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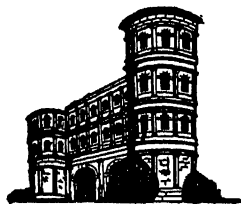
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A Layman Looks at Public School Education

by
Mortimer Smith



HENRY REGNERY COMPANY

Chicago, Illinois

1949

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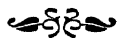
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To
ROBERT RAYNOLDS
In Small Payment
For Many Old Debts



FOREWORD

AMERICAN EDUCATION is so defective in theory and practice as seriously to threaten the long continuance of the way of life to further which this nation was founded. We have become, largely because of what schooling has done to us, a people incompetent to function as free men, which is something else again than flattered and manipulated robots. What is the use of abundance if we are trained to use it with the intelligence of children who never grow up? Quite a few observers of the American scene have lately been speaking their minds concerning this. Even I have said my two-pennies' worth about it. We fault-finders vary in the way we put things but we agree in being mighty dissatisfied, alarmed.

Now comes Mr. Mortimer Smith, with a new and fresh treatment of the subject, to join this company of the disturbed and vocal—a goodly group, albeit not well thought of by the pedagogical elite. The academic hierarchy will not sing Mr. Smith's praises, nor will it bother to denounce him. Its members will

serenely ignore him. They are too absorbed in teaching the teachers how to deal not with human beings but with creatures such as by nature ought not to exist, never could exist were it not for black magic; devoted to a more than dubious educational philosophy; pleased as Punch with themselves and unable to see how anyone in his right mind can jest at what they say. But Mr. Smith's thoughtful complaints will be welcomed by many who are intelligent laymen in respect to "education," people like himself; by many percipient parents aghast at what the schools have done or are doing to their boys and girls; by many who, intent on promoting sound government and decent craftsmanship of thought and action, must take the products of our schools and colleges and try to make something of them and by them in terms of adulthood. There will be not a few such persons who will be as grateful to Mr. Smith as I am for his penetration, his honesty, his simplicity; also for his charitable good humor, a thing hard to maintain when one is indignant.

Mr. Smith ends this admirable essay with a question. "We have been going on," he says, "for some time on the theory that education consists simply of experience and change and 'growth.' . . . Perhaps we need to set up some ends for education; perhaps we need to ask "growth for what?" He knows, of course, that there is no "perhaps" about it. Our professors

of education, our administrators, our school boards, teachers whom they train and employ, avoid inquiry about purpose as they would avoid the plague—purpose in life, in labor, in thought, in love, in citizenship, in anything, even in education itself. Why? Because to ask about the “why” of things is both personally disturbing and disruptive of whatever static social patterns happen to be. To ask “why” might result in teachers remaining human beings and children becoming human beings, both given to making embarrassing inquiries instead of being content to be placid tools for production and consumption of goods, complacent believers in whatever those who happen to wield social control tell them is the truth. Men who ask “why” are necessary, to be sure, for the survival of freedom and democracy. But who nowadays wishes a free state at the price of possible discomfort? Who for democracy is willing to run the risk of questioning closely those flattering demagogues who pleasingly blarney the electorate and who give much in bread and circuses? Certainly not the rank and file of hard-headed Americans.

The tragic thing about American education is that by avoiding ultimate questions and concentrating on how to get loaves and fishes, the schools and colleges make out of our youngsters precisely what their parents wish them to become. Mr. Smith bids us recognize that the fault lies not in our pedagogues but in

ourselves. "Educators" are bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh. What he advocates, therefore, is more dangerous by far than Communism. The Communist is not, as a matter of fact, much of a revolutionist. The Communist would only substitute the logical secularism of Karl Marx for the pragmatic secularism of John Dewey. But this man Smith is really and truly a revolutionist, comrade to Socrates, to Isaiah and Jeremy, to the Buddha, to the Christian saints. He, and the rest of us who toss about this sort of dynamite, ought to be locked up. The way things are moving, it looks not unlikely that before too long we shall be.

BERNARD IDDINGS BELL

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AND MADLY TEACH

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CHAPTER I

Concerning the Author's Bias

THERE IS SOMETHING CONDESCENDING and faintly derogatory about the term "layman." Once used to designate anyone who was not a member of the clergy, in our secular age it is an expression employed chiefly by professionals and experts in referring to one untrained in their particular disciplines, and its use is often accompanied—sometimes unwittingly but more often with malice aforethought—by a suggestion that the speaker is using it as a synonym for *ignoramus*. One doesn't mind this if the speaker is a physicist like Einstein or a surrealist painter; the subject matter with which both deal is largely beyond the comprehension of the ordinary mind, and any opinions one may have can only be tentative and offered in all humility. Except for newspaper columnists and book reviewers, we can't all have universal minds, comfortably and cozily at home in all fields of human endeavor.

But one of the less fortunate results of the modern scientific temper is a tendency to divide things that shouldn't be divided into exclusive areas where only the

expert is supposed to operate effectively. Today one of these things is public school education; it has been taken over by a coterie of experts who have erected it into an esoteric "science" where every prospect pleases and only the amateur is vile. But education is not so mysterious that it will yield its secrets only to the specialist. After all, practically every adult has been subjected to some amount of formal education, and if he is not too dull-witted, he can observe and evaluate its effects on him personally; and he will also observe contemporary young people who are the end products of current education.

This, then, is an essay about education by a layman and an amateur, and it is not written in sackcloth and ashes; it is written in the conviction that laymen—that is, parents and taxpayers—ought to get over their lazy indifference to the public schools and study the theory and practice of public-school education; in short, to find out what it is we are paying for and to which we so glibly turn over our children.

My own inclination was turned in this direction when, by chance, I had the opportunity to serve as a member of a board of education. This experience in a local situation whetted my appetite and prompted me, in trying to get beyond the parochial, to make forays outside my own bailiwick, and finally to attempt to digest large portions of rather soggy educational literature.

Before proceeding further, I feel I should speak a word of warning to anyone who intends to acquaint himself with the writings of modern educational theor-

ists. It will be rough sledding, for the writings of most educators sound as if they had been badly translated from the German. They are especially fond of making numbered lists of "goals" and "objectives," and then making subdivisions of "principles," "factors," and "implications," so that the reader finds it extremely difficult to follow the dizzy flight of the original point and gets bogged down in cross references. As an example of what I mean, I have recently been reading an article by a leading educator on "administration," which he informs us consists of three primary functions, eight elements, nine basic principles, and five relationships.

That our public schools are at the present time in a bad way is a notorious fact deplored by everyone, not least by the public-school educator himself. During the war the armed services uncovered an appalling degree of illiteracy among recent school graduates; the immense popularity of "comics" and low-grade magazine literature and, in general, the unwillingness to read anything that isn't accompanied by simple pictorial interpretation, seem to prove that what literacy there is among young people is of questionable value.

From every side come complaints that the typical public-school graduate can't spell or write a decent English sentence, that he is ignorant of the elementary facts of his country's history, and completely muddled about the rest of the world. There also seems to be a general feeling that he is a socially irresponsible animal, and this condition many prominent persons propose to correct

by some sort of compulsory national training program which would follow graduation from high school. In addition to the alleged inadequacies of the educational process there are widespread complaints about the mechanical conditions prevailing in our schools—poor school plants, outmoded equipment, miserably paid teachers.

As a nonprofessional with a limited knowledge of the subject, I am not prepared to testify that our public schools deserve such a sweeping indictment. But since educators themselves seem inclined to the feeling that universal education has not turned out to be the social panacea Horace Mann so optimistically envisioned one hundred years ago, perhaps it is safe to suggest that all is not too rosy.

Now if it is agreed that our public schools are not all they should be, it may be salutary to ask ourselves, without trying to measure the enormity of their sins, what is wrong, to seek to find if possible some of the causes of the breakdown. It always impresses me, when this question is asked, how coy educators are about facing it frankly, how skittish they are when it comes to discussing what seem to me to be the primary causes behind the low estate of the public schools. They are eloquent about poor equipment, dilapidated buildings, low salaries for teachers, and political-minded or ignorant boards of education, and they have a right to be. These conditions are widespread; and, as far as I can see, educators contend with them with a patience and fortitude which can only be described as heroic.

One gathers, however, that if these external handicaps could be eliminated, everything would be plain sailing; that is, if educators were permitted to work under ideal mechanical conditions, public-school education would be a universal boon. But this supposition leaves untouched the whole vital question of educational theory; it leaves unanswered the question of what kind of education is going to go on in the million-dollar schools staffed by the well-paid teachers. That is the question this little book will attempt to answer, at least with the tentativeness proper to the novice. In other words, this book will deal almost entirely with theory, and its main thesis will be that what is wrong with public school education is its theoretical and philosophical basis.

The reader at this point might object that I am a little presumptuous in assuming that there is an inclusive philosophy of education among public schoolmen. To this objection I can only counter that, if anyone will take the trouble to investigate, it will be found that those who make up the staffs of the schools and colleges of education, and the administrators and teachers whom they train to run the system, have a truly amazing uniformity of opinion regarding the aims, the content, and the methods of education. They constitute a cohesive body of believers with a clearly formulated set of dogmas and doctrines, and they are perpetuating the faith by seeing to it, through state laws and the rules of state departments of education, that only those teachers and administrators are certified who have been trained in correct dogma.

There are, of course, still survivors among the teachers of an earlier order and an earlier faith who became part of the system before the present dispensation gained such complete control. But these are all older men and women who are rapidly reaching the retirement age; and when they are gone the new order will reign supreme. I daresay that in another ten years it will be almost impossible for a teacher who has not been indoctrinated with "modern education" to find a place in the public schools.

Any proper book on education needs to begin with a definition and a statement of the author's particular bias; one hundred years ago, or even fifty years ago, the word "education" had a nearly universal meaning. To-day it has so many meanings and covers such a wide field that one can never be sure that two persons discussing it are talking about the same thing. When Robert M. Hutchins or the head of a Jesuit college discusses education, they will certainly be talking about a different breed of cats from what is meant when John Dewey or the dean of Teachers College, Columbia University, talks of education; the high school on the New Jersey coast which gives girls academic credit for courses in seamanship is operating under a theory of education which bears no relation to what goes on a few miles farther south at St. John's College, Annapolis, where education is confined largely to the reading of books.

In broadest terms education can be defined as the process of indiscriminate learning. That is, any indi-

vidual's education is what he knows: the sum total of the knowledge, information, and skills he has acquired along the way. For the purposes of this book such a definition is obviously unsatisfactory, for it deals with a *formal institution* of education, the public schools; and any institution must have a function which is selective and specific, not indiscriminate and miscellaneous.

The question, then, resolves itself into this: What should be the function of the public school or of any school for that matter, or what part of the total educative process should be specifically the task of the school? It is not possible, of course, to define a single, isolated function and say to the schoolman: Here is your task and your only task. There is a natural overlapping, with every educational agency and influence necessarily taking on some of the functions of all other educational agencies and influences. It is possible and indeed imperative, however, for any agency or institution of society, if it is to accomplish anything, to have a primary goal that takes precedence over all secondary goals.

My own views about the proper end and function of formal education are, I admit, what might be called old-fashioned, and I realize that at this point in my narrative I run the risk of having a certain type of reader throw the book down with disgust as he grunts, "Reactionary!" (He will be of the not-inconsiderable group of modern "scientific" thinkers who apply the terms "old-fashioned" and "reactionary" to almost everything man thought for two thousand years, and who believe

that the life of reason and the age of enlightenment began roughly about the year 1900.)

To use two terms currently held in great contempt, I think the task of the schools is chiefly intellectual and moral in nature: it must deal with ideas and it must form ideals. In the lower grades the primary task is to impart basic skills and elementary factual background, the three R's; but in the high school—and this is vitally important where the aim is education of the masses, most of whom will never have any further formal education—it is imperative that young people not only be trained in the utilitarian skills of mathematics, practical science, and languages, but that they learn about what we might call the spiritual history of mankind.

The current emphasis on “citizenship training” in the schools is a sound idea only if teachers realize that what some of them contemptuously call the dead past is the chief clue to how we became political animals. I would agree with Sir Richard Livingstone when he says that the two subjects most important to the secondary school are literature and history, “literature, where all the visions of men are recorded; and history, where, behind the confusion of unceasing movement, the human spirit can be discerned weaving, painfully and uncertainly, a coherent design.” *

I want to make myself entirely clear here. I am all for the schools' trying to produce the “well-rounded indi-

* *The Future in Education* (New York, The Cambridge University Press, 1941), p. 117.

vidual." I believe that those who want to learn manual skills, be it woodworking or cooking, should be given the opportunity as long as these remain more or less in the realm of play-activities and are properly subordinated to serious academic study.

Naturally, I am in favor of physical training but here again it must fall into its proper subordinate place. Physical training can, and very often does, especially in small-town and rural communities, assume an exaggerated importance, the tendency being to highly organized recreational activity, particularly among the boys, to the neglect of natural spontaneous play. Most physical educationists bow down before the great modern fetish of organization. The schoolman must look after many things: physical welfare, manual skills, practical talents; but primarily he must see that first things come first, that his principal task is to transmit to his charges an understanding of how humankind got this way. Only out of that understanding and intelligence will come enjoyment of living, which is the real end of education.

There is an atmosphere in our schools today which discourages the kind of education of which I speak. It is bad enough that the lower schools are failing to teach adequately the basic skills of reading, writing, and expression. What borders on the criminal is the poor teaching and neglect of those subjects that deal with the history of ideas and ideals, a knowledge of which is essential to all youth who would assume their place in society as thinking, feeling human beings. Our much-

touted American ideal of "education for all" is a fake ideal, for it doesn't mean what it says. Under the present order it only means that everyone will be trained to *do* something and only by chance will a few be educated to *become* something.)

As I have suggested, our public schools have not drifted into their present state; it is a matter of cause and effect. (There is a philosophy at work here, a philosophy that is a reflection of the general scientific and positivist spirit of our time. Public school education has been proceeding rapidly in the last fifty years in a direction opposed to the traditional conception of education. Under the impact of the modern temper and fortified by considerations of practical contemporary conditions, schoolmen have reached the conclusion that education is not even secondarily an intellectual matter—and as for its being a moral matter, heaven forbid!—that people are primarily doers rather than thinkers; that the essence of education, to quote John Dewey, is no more than, "vital energy seeking opportunity for effective exercise." *

This essay is an attempt to examine critically some of the outstanding doctrines of this "new education." I shall begin by trying to give something of the background of the movement—a short history of the general philosophical position—and then go on to deal with specific individual doctrines.

* *Democracy and Education* (New York, The Macmillan Co., 1939), p. 84.

CHAPTER II

The Philosophical Basis of Modern Education

MUCH OF MODERN EDUCATIONAL thought has its roots in the past, in the reformers Rousseau, Froebel, and Pestalozzi; but I think it would be generally agreed that the philosophical godfather of the movement is John Dewey. Traditionally, philosophers are scholarly, bookish individuals who are happy to idle in quiet backwaters, avoiding the main stream of the life about them, content in the hope that whatever small contribution they may make to the total of the world's thought will make itself apparent to future students examining a past age; but a happy exception to this tradition is Professor Dewey, whose long life may rightfully be called a useful one, and whose thought has had the most direct and potent sort of influence on the society in which he has lived, and in the one field of educational theory has been the dominant influence in America during the past fifty years.

In considering first the larger philosophy of Mr. Dewey, I do so with some trepidation. For the amateur,

philosophy contains semantic pitfalls: it has a jargon of its own, and the outsider can never be certain he is using words in the same meaning they have for the initiated. This is especially true in dealing with a philosopher with a style as austere and unbending as Professor Dewey's. One's optimism regarding correct interpretation is not heightened by the fact that such distinguished colleagues of Dewey's as Santayana and Bertrand Russell have been accused by him of misunderstanding his philosophical position. What follows, then, is offered in the hope that it does not do too great a violence to the original.

Assuming that the most important element in a system of philosophy is its theory of knowledge, Dewey's great contribution to philosophy has been the development of the pragmatic, or, as he calls it, the instrumental-experimental theory of knowing. He follows in the tradition of Charles Peirce and William James, the founders of pragmatism, although he differs widely from James, whose pragmatism was bound up with matters of religion and beliefs which have no appeal for Dewey.

Dewey maintains that reality is that which is experienced and that everything outside of experience is unreal and for all practical purposes nonexistent; hence knowledge is always functional and concrete, never theoretical and abstract. He would agree with James that ideas (which are but parts of our experience) are instruments of response and adaptation, and their truth is not to be judged by any absolute standards but in

terms of their effectiveness; in other words, that is "true value" which works satisfactorily.

He strongly rejects philosophical idealism with its doctrine that fundamental and ultimate reality is to be found in the mind; with equal positiveness he rejects the position of the realist who maintains that reality exists independently of mental perception. Perhaps I can illustrate these conflicting theories by resorting to the time-honored device of philosophers of taking a physical object as an example in reasoning about reality; I will take the desk upon which I am writing and see how these different philosophical spokesmen regard it.

The idealist will say that the desk exists as a concrete reality only when I perceive it and that when I leave the room it ceases to exist except in the mind of God, Who perceives everything and at all times. The realist, on the other hand, will say that the desk exists independently of my perception of it and will continue to exist if I leave the room and never come back.

Now if your pragmatist-instrumentalist is asked for an opinion he will differ radically from both the idealist and the realist; he will say that the question of the desk's existence is academic and irrelevant until I have an experience in relation to it; that is, until a practical problem-to-be-solved about the desk arises. It may be a simple problem such as, Is the desk too heavy for me to move unaided to another part of the room? My idea is a response to the particular situation and a plan of action; and after I have lifted or pushed the desk to de-

termine its weight, my idea is instrumental in creating the object of knowledge, which in this case is the degree of heaviness of the desk.*

The concept of intelligence put forward by this philosophy is biological and behavioristic; it is the concept of animal intelligence, limiting human thought to its function as organic response to the stimuli of the environment. Mr. Dewey's critics have insisted that instrumentalism is highly subjective; and certainly a philosophy based on the idea that only that which is experienced is real may be fairly said to lean heavily toward subjectivism. Indeed, it would seem that if Mr. Dewey were really consistent in his theory that knowledge is born only of active experience, he must feel he has wasted his time in writing some score or more volumes trying to give others experience vicariously.

It should not be supposed, however, from the subjective nature of this philosophy that its author neglects the social. On the contrary, no one has been more insistent in emphasizing the social character of intelligence, or more optimistic about the possibilities of directing it; indeed, Mr. Dewey's enthusiasm has led him to be a great believer in the virtues of "scientific planning" as the means of achieving the "brave new world."

* In illustrating how these theories of knowledge differ, I have paraphrased (with permission) a section of Frederick S. Breed's excellent article, "A Realistic View of Education," appearing in *20th Century Education* (New York, Philosophical Library, 1946). This does not mean, of course, that Mr. Breed would necessarily agree with my interpretation of Dewey's philosophy.

Now Dewey's larger philosophy is closely related to education. As he has himself said, philosophy is really "the general theory of education." What are this particular philosopher's educational theories? His idea of reality and conception of knowledge maintains, of course, that knowledge is primarily active, not passive; he has always belittled an education "which appeals for the most part simply to the intellectual aspect of our natures," and has consistently appealed for a curriculum that would emphasize our impulses "to make, to do, to create, to produce. . . ." *

If I understand Dewey aright, the important thing about knowing and experience is not the end but the actual process itself. This unfolding and continuous experience is what he calls growth, and it is this growth that is important without, as far as I can see, any answers being provided to the all-important question, Growth towards what? In defining ends Dewey never seems to get beyond such vague terms as "desirable" and "satisfactory."

As each experience, according to this philosophy, is sufficient unto itself, education should not be a preparation for the future but should be concerned with the present and immediate capabilities and interests of the learner. "Democracy" (and here Dewey uses the word as synonymous with education) "is the faith that the process of experience is more important than any special

* *School and Society* (rev. ed.; Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1915), pp. 41-44.

results obtained, so that special results achieved are of ultimate value only as they are used to enrich and order the ongoing process." *

Dewey's pragmatism comes to the fore in his insistence that education must be scientific and experimental. His position is that in teaching, and indeed in all human and social relationships, we must approach the subject exactly as the scientist approaches his physical laboratory tests. We do not start off with preconceived notions of what is "true," but must search for what is workable by weighing and testing evidence, gathering facts, producing proofs. As the "truths" of physical science are modified by changing conditions and new knowledge, so are the "truths" of human nature; there are no ultimates or any universal, timeless human values.

Such traditional concepts as God, truth, and even the existence of the unseen cosmos are not things that can be verified in experience but only speculated about, and speculation, according to Dewey, has real value only when it results in concrete, measurable ends. Here Dewey was the forerunner of the now considerable group of "social scientists" who urge us to abandon our ingrained habits of metaphysical thought and throw ourselves for salvation into the arms of science. Let us not brood over imponderables (say these brethren); let's not engage in idle speculation about ultimate issues, but let us be concerned with the here and now, with "knowl-

* Cited by Herbert W. Schneider, *A History of American Philosophy* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1946), p. 571.

edge of conditions as they are," to use Dewey's own phrase; and out of our scientific weighing and measuring will emerge all the "truth" we need for a happy life.

In the light of Dewey's philosophy and its general educational implications, what are his concrete proposals for educational reform? A philosopher is not expected to produce a program of practical action, and ordinarily Mr. Dewey is suitably vague; but the following statement from his book *Experience and Education* suggests some explicit reforms:

If one attempts to formulate the philosophy of education implicit in the practices of the new education, we may, I think, discover certain common principles. . . . To imposition from above is opposed expression and cultivation of individuality; to external discipline is opposed free activity; to learning from texts and teachers, learning through experience; to acquisition of isolated skills and techniques by drill, is opposed acquisition of them as means of attaining ends which make direct vital appeal; to preparation for a more or less remote future is opposed making the most of the opportunities of present life, to static aims and materials is opposed acquaintance with a changing world.*

If the reader will bear with me, I shall try to show how the influence of this philosophy of education has been unfortunate; but perhaps I should first point out that it is somewhat unfair and inaccurate to hold up

* New York, The Macmillan Co., 1938, cited in John Dewey, *Intelligence in the Modern World*, ed. by Joseph Ratner (New York, The Modern Library, 1939), pp. 656-57.

Dewey, as some extremists among schoolmen of the traditional persuasion have done, as the unmitigated villain of American education. Some of the reforms of the so-called progressive group as led by Dewey, Kilpatrick and others have generated a healthy, needful breeze in a sometimes stuffy atmosphere.

The primary contribution of this group, stemming from the early reforms advocated by Pestalozzi and Rousseau, has been the introduction of humaneness in education, the recognition of the child as an individual and not a robot, an individual who needs to live a happy and expressive life in the present as well as in some remote future. That the progressives have carried individuality to sentimental and even sometimes unscientific lengths is undoubtedly true, but most adults who are not blinded by nostalgia for their own "good old days," would admit, I think, that the progressive emphasis on humane consideration of the child's personality has tended to make classrooms of today happier places than those of twenty-five or fifty years ago.

Another valuable contribution of Dewey and his followers has been the emphasis on action, the attempt to relate thinking and doing, the mental and the physical. Here again, however, exaggeration has crept in and a basically sound idea has been blown up to foolish proportions. In his zeal for the old and tried, the traditionalist should not overlook the many sensible aids to teaching and some of the sound guiding principles undoubtedly contained in progressive education. It is

enough to point out that the movement has had a tendency to erect methods into dogmas with the unfortunate result that the process of learning overshadows the content to be learned.

In its pure form Dewey's philosophy of education had its most notable practical application in the progressive movement (chiefly confined to private schools), which saw its heyday in the decade 1925-35, and which has since been somewhat modified and even emasculated. But the Deweyan line, again modified and toned down, has been seeping into the faculties of schools of education during the past twenty-five years, until today this modified version of progressive education is largely the official philosophy of American public school education.

I think one of the chief reasons it has triumphed with comparative ease is to be found in the changing practical conditions of the public schools. To take an obvious example: in the kind of human material it contained, the high school of 1900 or even of 1920 was a far more selective and homogeneous group than the high school of today; the student body was, on the whole, of good average intelligence, capable of being educated and, more important, anxious to be. Our high school population today is swollen to huge proportions (over six million in 1941 as against a little over two million in 1919) and is extremely heterogeneous, including millions of youths who formerly were absorbed into the various trades upon graduation from grammar school. And a large number of these (as much as one-third of the total

high-school population, according to some estimates) are what educators sometimes call nonverbal; that is, they do not learn easily by use of the traditional printed word.

As this condition became more and more acute the public school system was faced with two alternative ways of meeting it: one a hard way calling for the utmost in ingenuity and patience, the other an easy and far more tempting way. The first way is based on the conviction that education consists of the attempt to transmit the whole heritage of man's progress through history and to evolve from that study spiritual and moral standards by which the individual learner can live in the contemporary world. This way assumes that education is a basic need of everyone regardless of his capabilities.

To give youth this kind of education with any degree of success is a task of enormous difficulty in the face of the variegated, conglomerate mass of our public school population. It means that teachers have to devise, for the one-third who cannot be reached by conventional and traditional methods, radically new means and techniques of teaching. It is especially important to reach this group in the high school, for they are the ones who do not go on to higher institutions of learning. Perhaps it can't be done; perhaps it is too herculean a task; if my own slight experience with teachers is any criterion, I would say that most of them are very pessimistic on this score. It would seem that our American public-school system as a whole is not meeting the challenge of chang-

ing conditions in this manner; it is choosing the other, and easier, way.

Harassed to the point of desperation by trying to teach history to nonverbal Johnnies or grammar to unbookish Marys, American teachers fell with loud hosannas on the famous statement of Mr. Dewey's:

Not knowledge or information, but self-realization, is the goal. Literally we must take our stand with the child, and our departure from him. It is he, and not the subject matter, which determines both quality and quantity of learning.*

Here was a doctrine that released the teacher from his responsibility for handing on the traditional knowledge of the race, a doctrine that firmly implied that one need not adhere to any standards of knowledge but simply cater to individual interests; and it was made the more attractive by the suggestion that this procedure was to be undertaken in behalf of "self-realization," an ideal to which only a brutish sort of person indeed could oppose himself.

With the acceptance of this doctrine American public school education took the easy way to meet its problems with a result painfully obvious today, namely, that the problems have not been solved, but are aggravated to the point of breakdown and chaos. This is the inevitable result of adopting instrumentalism as a phi-

* Cited by Ernest Cobb in *One Foot on the Ground* (New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1932), p. 21.

losophy of education, for it teaches that there are no intellectual or moral standards of knowledge, that no subject is intrinsically of any more value than any other subject; in the end it reduces education to a vast bubbling confusion, in which training in mechanical skills is put on a par with the development of mind and imagination, in which hairdressing and embalming are just as important, if not a little more so, than history and philosophy.

It is a peculiarly American philosophy, for it buttresses many of our national prejudices: distrust of abstract and disinterested thought and pleasure in concrete action and affairs, suspicion of those who do not conform to the average, and delight in whatever "works." Bertrand Russell's observation that Dewey is pre-eminently the philosopher of American industrialism * seems apt; even more so does the remark of Ludwig Lewisohn, made many years ago, that Mr. Dewey is the "prophet of an increasingly desolate and arid period of the spirit." †

I do not mean to imply that Dewey is blindly accepted as the patron saint of modern education, or that educators have adopted his ideas and point of view without reservations; that would be assigning an importance and significance to personal influence which it rarely, if ever, exerts. But it does seem to me that Dewey

* *A History of Western Civilization* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1945), p. 827.

† *Expression in America* (New York, Harper & Bros., 1932), p. 335.

and his more articulate followers came along at a period when educators were desperately seeking solutions to changing practical problems, and provided not detailed plans but general directions that the educators have accepted in spirit.

Among such a large group there are, of course, varying shades of opinion and interpretation, but there is emerging today a fairly consistent educational philosophy which may differ in details but is basically Deweyan. The doctrines of the new education are many. They have not all been translated as yet into general practice in our public schools, but they are making considerable inroads and there is every indication that they will ultimately triumph.

CHAPTER III

The Doctrines of Modern Education

1. Modern education says: *The school must educate the whole child; it must be so organized that it meets the developmental demands of every side of the child's nature, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, physical.*

WE ARE ALL APT to make the mistake of thinking of education only in its formalized aspect. If you were playing one of those parlor games that educators call "objective tests" and were given the word *education* and asked to write opposite it the first associated thing that came into your mind, wouldn't you be apt to write *school*? We instinctively think of education as something we get from organized courses in a formal institution. Because of a persistent confusion in modern educational theory it is imperative that we emphasize the obvious truth that as education is the whole process of adapting the individual to the environment, the school can only be one factor in that process, not necessarily even the most important one.

In the beginning of a child's life parents are the pri-

mary educators; under their tutelage the child develops rudimentary physical and verbal skills and elementary manners, tastes, and social and moral attitudes, and this before he ever sees the inside of a school. As he grows older, all sorts of situations and institutions outside the school contribute to his education: informal association with other people, independent reading, games, the movies and radio; the church, clubs, the Boy Scouts, or any of the many organizations that flourish among us. Nor does education cease with adult life; rather, where active intelligence, capable of reflective thought, is present, education ripens into mature wisdom. This is the kind of education of which Clemenceau spoke when he said: "All that I know I learned after I was thirty."

This truism about education—that it is a continuous process derived from the total environment—is an idea accepted universally, even by modern educators. But where the theories of the latter run off into confusion and their practice into chaos is in their failure to draw any clear distinctions regarding the role the different forces of the environment should play in the development and education of youth.

While the home, the school, the church, and the community are social forces impinging on each other, they are each distinctive in nature and have different functions. The tendency of modern education or, more particularly, public school education, is to aggregate all these functions in the school. A persistent current theory is that "education is life"; and this is interpreted to

mean that the school should try to do everything, that it should try artificially to reproduce the total environment in the school.

The Educational Policies Commission of the National Education Association, the most powerful and influential educational organization in this country, in its 1944 report entitled "Education for *All American Youth*," says: "It is the job of the school to meet the common and specific individual needs of youth." These needs turn out to be ten in number and include the need to develop salable skills, to develop and maintain physical fitness, to understand the rights and duties of a citizen in a democracy, to understand the significance of the family, to know how to purchase and use goods and services, to understand the influence of science on human life, to develop appreciation of literature, art, music, and nature, to be able to use leisure time wisely, to develop respect for other persons, and to grow in ability to think rationally. Here surely is a comprehensive program covering everything except a course in how to come in out of the rain; here is a program that frankly proposes that the schools should take over the total education of youth.

Don't think this is only a paper blueprint dreamed up by a professional "planner." It is not exceptional but representative, and more and more schools throughout the country are being devoted to the all-inclusive program it advocates. State departments of education are strenuously propagandizing in its behalf; I refer you spe-

cifically to two typical reports: "Basic Issues in Secondary Education," issued by the New York State Education Department, and one emanating from Connecticut with the mouth-filling title, "The Redirection, Reorganization, and Retooling of Secondary Education."

The Connecticut report in particular is worth studying, for it is detailed and specific in regard to the curriculum. In addition to the traditional studies—English, mathematics, languages, science—here is only a partial list of the things the high school is expected to teach: socio-economic problems, home care of the sick, driver education, safe living, industrial hygiene, community health, care of children, home decorating, consumer education, boy and girl problems, personal grooming, hospitality, an understanding of reproduction, occupational training, and housing. And to take care of the student's spare time, if any, the report advocates the organizing of a special department in which "every worthy purpose and valuable interest of the individual may have a place." *

Both these reports recognize that if this program is to be effective, the school must have more of the student's time. The Connecticut report speaks of "the tyranny of the short school day," and the New York report states that "in the future there must be educational dividends during the summer months." (Translated from professional jargon, or pedagogue, into English, I suppose this last statement means that youth must be compelled to

* Pp. 26, 42, 50.

attend school throughout the year.) The National Education Association recommends an increase of about 28 per cent over the present average length of term in public schools, and most educators, following the lead of this association, also advocate that the present state laws which generally call for compulsory school attendance until the age of sixteen be raised to eighteen.

The tendency to broaden the function and scope of the public school has given rise to another movement which is being pushed with great vigor at the moment—the so-called “community school.” Its advocates maintain that the school should be the center of community life and should draw in not only youth but adults who would use the school building in the evenings for adult education, hobby training, courses in homemaking, canning, woodworking, masonry, catering. In short, as Dr. N. L. Engelhardt, a leader in the movement, has said, “The school will serve all and sundry educational needs of the community.”

Not as a term of abuse but simply as a descriptive adjective, the word one might fitly apply to this system of education is *totalitarian*, for its aim is to have the school assume responsibility for the total education of youth up to the age of eighteen and to extend its domain into the field of mature education. But in this diffuseness of modern education lies one of its principal weaknesses; one is reminded of the remark about Napoleon, that the trouble with him was that he tried to do too much and did it. In trying to do too much, in

trying to play all the roles in the educational drama, the modern school fails to do complete justice to any and leaves the audience confused and with only the foggiest notions of what the play is all about.

Educators are fond of making "re-valuations" of their system to discover what is wrong, but invariably they emerge from this soul-searching not with the thought that they are doing too much but that they aren't doing enough. The remedy always consists of piling some new weights on the back of the school system until today it threatens to collapse from sheer overloading.

While the scope of the school is thus being greatly enlarged, we expect less and less from the student in the way of genuine educational accomplishment. A recent commissioner of education of the state of Connecticut not so long ago made the astounding statement that we have a right to expect the high-school graduate to know "how to write a letter . . . carry on a telephone conversation, send a telegram, or carry on an intelligent interview." There's a noble mark to aim at!

As our high schools spend less and less time on serious education and more and more on matters that can best be learned outside of school, there is an inevitable drop in standards all along the line. The lowering of college entrance requirements which has been going on for the past twenty years or so (now somewhat abated because the currently overcrowded colleges can be more selective) is directly traceable to the diluted education that has been going on in our public schools. Graduates sim-

ply can't make the grade, and if the colleges are not to close up shop, they have to accept inferior material.

The idea that the school should take over total education has appeared in other places, but it has until recently been strange to American thought and life. It may be part of an irresistible historical force, the tide of which we can do little to abate; I refer to the modern lessening of individual freedom and the exaltation of the power of the social group and the state. The feeling for individual freedom and individual responsibility has never in modern times been at a lower ebb; and as we are all ready and anxious to turn our problems and our lives over to the political power, what is more natural than that we should entrust that power with the complete education of our children?

But is it too late to warn educators (who are, we can assume, good men, not evil, motivated by the best of ideals) that humane zealots for total systems of any kind can easily slip over into tyranny? Those who devise over-all plans for salvation hope they will be voluntarily accepted; but as success depends on acceptance of the plan it will be necessary to eliminate opposition. Confirmed do-gooders always end by doing good by coercion; their devotion to the end will blind them to the deviousness of the means employed.

The situation in this country in regard to compulsory military training is not without relevance to my point. Since the President of the United States, Army leaders, and other distinguished citizens, convinced of the value

of compulsory military training for the youth of this country, were aware of the fact that such a program is fundamentally repugnant to a large segment of the American people, they attempted to present it in another guise. One of the interesting things about this situation is the statement Mr. Truman made to his commission appointed to study the problem:

I want that word "military" left out. . . . I want our young people to be informed on what this government is, what it stands for—its responsibilities. And I think the best way to do this is through a universal training program. . . . I don't like to think of it as a universal military training program. I want it to be a universal training program, giving our young people a background in the disciplinary approach of getting along with one another, informing them of their physical make-up, and what it means to take care of this temple which God gave us.*

Even for a gentleman notoriously adept at the process, this is a new high in letting a whole series of cats out of the bag. So our young people are to learn the "disciplinary approach" of getting along with one another, are they? In other times we talked about freedom and left that kind of discipline to the Prussians. And if 18-year-olds have to be informed as to what this government stands for and have yet to learn about their own physical make-up, what does this imply about our schools, which

* Quoted in an editorial, "No Universal Training!" *Christian Century*, LXIV (Jan. 8, 1947).

are supposed to have been teaching these things all along? The commission goes along docilely with Mr. Truman's moral hedging by enumerating among the benefits of compulsory training the opportunities it would afford for "inculcating spiritual and moral ideals in support of the American democracy."

There is a sort of moral abandon shown by the proponents of this scheme in their willingness to use the worst means to achieve what they sincerely think are good ends, for this training is to be done by the Army, which no sane person has ever considered a good educative influence. Armies are unfortunately all too necessary, but it is criminally foolish to pretend that their purpose is anything other than defense and offense in war—that is, preventing as many deaths as possible on one side and causing as many deaths as possible on the other side.

If we think it a worthy aim to give young people "a background in the disciplinary approach of getting along with one another," then the Army, God knows, is an ideal teacher, for its discipline is the easiest sort to teach: it simply consists of assuming life-and-death authority over individuals. And I wonder if the eminent gentlemen of the commission have really convinced themselves that the Army is a competent teacher of the "spiritual and moral ideals of democracy"? That sincere democrats believe in this sort of thing is another indication of how widespread and infectious is the current distrust of freedom.

An ironic fact emerges out of the history of the last fifty years: during this period, while men have been steadily turning away from religious and moral absolutes, they have been caught up ever tighter in the grip of another absolutism, that of the social group and the state. And part of the irony is that in England and America the leaders in this movement of setting up the authority of the collective are the heirs of historic liberalism which was firmly rooted, in the words of Ramsey Muir, in a "conviction that the source of all progress lies in the free exercise of individual energy." *

An uneasy fear haunts both the advocates of total education and of military training—the feeling that the free agencies of society, and especially the home, have broken down and left youth aimlessly drifting, rudderless. This same feeling swept over Germany after the first World War and caused good people to accept the Nazi philosophy that the state must take over all the activities of youth (although it should be added that here the process was made simpler by the average German's native desire to throw himself into the arms of authority). The schools and the Army, therefore, must take over and not only do the jobs they are best fitted to do but do the job of the home as well.

If we admit that the home has broken down (the statistics of divorce, juvenile delinquency, and crime do not indicate a state of vigorous health), we are in a

* Article, "The Liberal Party," *Encyclopedia Britannica* (14th ed.; 1932).

sorry state indeed; we are saying that we as individuals are no longer capable of managing our own lives, and this is another way of saying that society is sick unto death. There is no need to wax sentimental over the American home; like other institutions of society it is full of faults. But a healthy society is based on the family, operating as a free and responsible agency, and each time the family relinquishes any of its functions to the social group or the state, our free society is thereby weakened.

Not all those individuals who opposed compulsory education a century and more ago were reactionaries; some of them had clear prescience of the dangers of such a system. In view of the present development of our schools can we say they were entirely wrong? Founded as a convenient device for the purpose of transmitting the heritage of the race from generation to generation, our schools under the political power have aggregated unto themselves more and more functions. Today our schoolman with his determination to educate "the whole child" finds the home and parents simply embarrassments to the accomplishment of his purpose. Perhaps in a happier future when the school building is used all day for youth and all evening for adults, children can leave by the front door while their parents enter by the rear, thus avoiding all corrupting contacts and leaving the schoolman untrammelled in his efforts to educate the whole child.

2. Modern education says: *The curriculum must be based on the child's needs, interests, and abilities.*

This doctrine might be called the cornerstone of modern educational theory, for it is advocated on every hand and dinned into every prospective teacher. It is a nice, plausible-sounding doctrine and indeed a perfectly valid one if accepted cautiously and with reservations; for it is obviously true that all students do not have the same interests or the same abilities and that learning will be most effective when it takes account of these individual differences.

The good teacher will always encourage native talents, but if a well-rounded education is the objective—as it should be—he will make every effort to ensure that the student works hard at the things for which he doesn't have much talent or taste. If you are passionately fond of history, the chances are you are going to learn it more thoroughly than mathematics, which may fill you with *ennui*. But for the teacher to deduce from this circumstance that the curriculum for you ought to be centered around your interest in history is to abandon objective values and to say in effect that a good education is simply one which teaches you about the things in which you are interested.

In modern educational practice this turns out to be essentially a lazy man's theory and enables the teacher who finds Johnny or Mary a little dull-witted in the

academic subjects to ease up on them on the basis of supposed lack of "interest" and "ability" and to shove them into more courses in manual training or industrial arts or home economics, where mechanical skill takes precedence over thinking. The courses in these latter subjects are indeed very often nothing more than a device for taking care of pupils the school feels it can't educate.

I once heard an educator illustrate the theory that learning is most significant when it relates to the learner's concerns and interests by drawing an idyllic picture of American farm life of fifty years ago. He asked us to recall what a splendid education the farm boy got in "real life" by feeding the chickens, milking the cows, planting and harvesting, and so forth; and he pointed out how freely the boy entered into this education because of its direct concern with him, and because it gave him an opportunity to express himself in action.

I do not question for a moment the value of such an activity; but I think that educator was deluding himself about the boy's joy in the farm work, for it is a notorious fact that the last fifty years has seen a steadily increasing stampede of farm boys escaping the joys of farm work for the dullness of city life. I don't think the farm boy then or now did his work for any more glamorous reason than that he had to do it; I don't think work is something most children enjoy, whether it relates to their concerns or is remote from those concerns. Pleasure in work is at best a rudimentary feeling in youth and

fully develops only with maturity—and sometimes not even then. Anybody who has observed children even in the most superficial way knows they don't like to work. Did you ever know a child who enjoyed mowing the lawn or drying the dishes even when he had the incentive of earning money by doing it?

Now as a large part of education is work (the less facility you have for a particular subject the harder you will have to work), the teacher must necessarily be a task-master; and the fact that nasty characters like Dr. Arnold of Rugby and Mr. Squeers of Dotheboys Hall thought so too doesn't detract in the slightest from the hard unsentimental truth of the matter. Only a psychopathic teacher will consider the work an end in itself; it is only the means, the always slow and sometimes painful means, by which a child develops towards the understanding that is necessary for happiness and a feeling of pleasure in life. To evolve a theory which holds that the child should not have to make the attempt to learn subjects which do not interest him and for which he seems to have little ability or which do not relate to his seeming concerns—to say, in short, that the hard task, the unpleasant task, should be abandoned—is to cheat the future adult.

A logical outcome of this doctrine is that the idea that there should be common standards of learning is now considered terribly "old hat." I have referred to the report issued a few years ago by the New York State Education Department; this report, prepared by ten

leading public-school men, states: "While there is an obligation on the school's part to emphasize the mastery of essential learnings, there is no intention in the prescription of constants that pupils shall be held to a common level of achievement." * I believe this statement would be acceptable to almost all modern educators. But doesn't this supposition—that there are in education no general standards that all students should meet but only standards for each according to his ability—doesn't this supposition make education largely meaningless?

Dr. Mort and Dr. Vincent, who paint a glowing picture of modern education in their recent book *A Look at Our Schools*, say: "The employer, like the parent, should realize that there is every level of competence in every aspect of human activity. The particular combination of talents he wants in the persons he hires cannot be engraved on a high school diploma." †

While this is true enough in one sense, we may well ask why the employer, in hiring the graduate of a commercial high school course, shouldn't expect that her diploma means she can not only type and do shorthand

* The term "constants" is educational cant for the basic subjects of the curriculum, such as English, history, mathematics, etc. In Connecticut these subjects are called "fundamentals" and elsewhere are referred to variously as "common learnings," "general education," "solids," or "core curriculum." Educators are highly inventive when it comes to double-talk.

† Paul R. Mort & William S. Vincent, *A Look at Our Schools* (New York, The Ronald Press Company, 1946), p. 46.

but that she can spell and has some sense of how to use the English language. Why is it unreasonable to demand that a high school diploma represent genuine educational accomplishment towards meeting a general standard of learning? If we accept the theory that the job of the school is to teach each pupil according to his supposed capacity, then the only thing we can be sure a high school diploma means is that the pupil spent four years in the school building.

I can never understand how the modern schoolman who has a fetish about education being as nearly as possible a duplication of "real life" can reconcile this point of view with the doctrine that accomplishment is to be measured by interest and capacity. Real life is full of compulsions; it is dominated by competition, and the adult is constantly having to submit to examinations with his fellows; but these are conditions the thorough-going modernist will not permit in his classroom. The result is that in the end all his elaborate effort to reproduce real life experiences amounts to play and make-believe, a kind of mimicry. The young person who has been indoctrinated with this kind of education will find, when he graduates into the adult world, that the idea of being "in competition only with yourself" bears little relation to that world.

What I find most misleading about this doctrine is the "needs" part of it. While it is true in the psychological sense that the needs of individuals vary (one pupil may be of a dependent nature and in constant

need of encouragement while another may be entirely independent and without this need), it is also true that what set us apart as human beings are certain common needs that only education in the true sense can meet.

It is a mistake to conceive of education only as a training towards mechanical competence, for competence alone can never make for that understanding of what human life at its best can be—a deep-seated desire of even the most inarticulate of human beings. The belittling of what they call “verbal intelligence” and “bookishness” by Dr. Mort and Dr. Vincent seems highly futile, for by far the greater part of man’s wisdom is stored up in books. And the fact that one pupil may have less facility for gleaning it than another does not alter the truth that both have the need for that wisdom.

Here the teacher in the field may object: “This is all very well but you don’t know some of my pupils. Many of them are just incapable of learning the bookish subjects, and when they have real talent for more practical matters, it seems wrong to insist on the former while neglecting the latter.” But this is the challenge of modern teaching: how to reach every pupil, bookish and nonbookish, with the world’s wisdom. It is not an easy task (perhaps it calls for a genius we haven’t the right to expect in the average teacher), but only by accomplishing it will common human needs be met.

One can certainly agree with the progressives that old-

fashioned methods of teaching history and literature are badly in need of revision, even if one disagrees with the suggested new methods. Dates and lists of battles and assorted other facts in history have their place, but history is more than this: it is the unfolding story of man's progress through time, and even the dullest pupil can enjoy a story if the teacher has a sense of drama.

The study of literature can be exciting when the pupil awakes to the realization that Shakespeare and Milton are saying things about life and human nature which have a direct bearing on contemporary affairs, but he will never experience this awakening if teachers continue to teach *The Merchant of Venice* and *Paradise Lost* piecemeal, line by line, torturing all the meat and meaning out of them. But the fact that teaching is a difficult and subtle art is no reason for abandoning true education and telling ourselves that training in skills (which is far simpler for the teacher) is an adequate substitute. The need of our times is not for more well-trained people but for more better-educated people.

3. Modern education says: *Teaching must be reorganized to eliminate as much as possible systematic learning of logically organized subject matter, to be replaced by integration of all subject matter towards an over-all objective.*

This is another cardinal tenet of the new education inherited from Dewey and his followers, and is being ap-

plied particularly in the early, elementary-school phase of education. Dewey has said that it is a mistake for the teacher to tell or state things to the pupil "for the sake of impressing them upon another, merely in order to test him to see how much he has retained and can literally reproduce." The thing that has to be done is to link up "the net results of the experience of the group and even the race with the immediate experience of an individual."

Subject matter must deal with real, not theoretical, situations; lifelikeness and reality are the desirable qualities, according to Dr. Mort and Dr. Vincent. These authors tell us that first-graders should not be drilled on processes of addition and subtraction, but kept busy playing counting games, measuring the width and breadth of the room, weighing themselves and recording gains in weight—that is, applying arithmetic to real-life situations. These same authors suggest that we must not teach geography in the deadly fashion of the 1900-model school—that is, by required reading and systematic learning of facts, but by dramatization of phases of the life of foreign children, preparation of illustrated booklets, building of model cities and farms.

As an accompaniment to his opposition to logically organized subject matter the modernist usually advocates building the curriculum around major "goals" or "objectives" and integrating all subject matter around these goals. One of the primary outcomes of this idea has been the growth of the so-called social studies.

Probably most of the readers of this book went to school in the old unhappy days when history, geography, and civics were definite, separate courses; but their children know them as social studies, or even as "social sciences."

I want to avoid all amateur dogmatism on this particular doctrine, but from my admittedly limited experience I must confess to a certain degree of skepticism. I'm not at all sure that drill, practice, and memorization are as ineffective in the learning process as our modern schoolman would have us believe. They are not ends in themselves, certainly, but do they not constitute the indispensable spadework that must be gone through before understanding can come alive, just as the musician's long novitiate of practicing mechanical scales and octaves is the necessary preliminary to his being able to play with facility, understanding, and feeling?

Considering it solely on the basis of accumulated factual knowledge, I wonder if the contemporary youth knows as much as the benighted 1900-model school pupil. He is a little more glib in his opinions perhaps, but as to his knowing as much, I doubt it. The old saw about the little boy from a modern school who countered his mother's complaint about his getting only 30 in arithmetic and spelling by proudly pointing out that he got 100 in Postwar Planning, is not without a large kernel of truth.

Dr. Mort and Dr. Vincent complain that the older type of school spent too much wasted motion in drill and practice of word meanings, spelling rules, sentence

diagrams, problems in area and volume, the answers to which were soon forgotten because they didn't relate to practical use and real situations. Then they quote the hypothetical case of the person who said, "I never really began to learn Spanish, although I had four years of it in school, until I had to take over our firm's South American correspondence." * But weren't the student's long years of application to Spanish grammar, syntax, and pronunciation a pretty vital element in his learning the language? He could have learned Spanish by going to South America and mimicking the speech of the natives, but to conduct correspondence he had to learn the structure of the language, which means abstract study and drill. Of course, part of the value of knowledge is in use, but in acquiring knowledge there is necessarily a long, difficult period of what often seems to the student useless and tiring practice. Nothing thoroughly learned is ever forgotten; it lies buried deep in memory, ready to rise to the consciousness when the occasion for use presents itself.

You may protest that nobody but pedants remember the dates of history or the rules of grammar or the names of rivers and principal cities in geography; so why emphasize these "inert facts"? The purpose of education, you may say, is not to train young people for participation in radio quiz shows. No one, of course, should be expected to remember the multifarious details of all school subjects, and no one does; but isn't one's educa-

* *Ibid.*, p. 25.

tion largely the valuable residuum that results from exposure to this diversity of factual information?

You may have forgotten the rules of syntax and how to parse a sentence, but your study of grammar has left you with an instinctive sense of how to construct a sentence. You may have forgotten the dates of the reign of Henry VIII and the adoption of the Monroe Doctrine, but you have a sense of the chronological order of man's history on this globe. You may not be able to name off-hand the ten principal rivers of the United States or the capitals of all the states, but you have an ordered geographical picture of your country and other countries. Call these dull facts if you wish, but they are the indispensable background of a well-ordered, that is, a well-educated, mind. And the time—the only time—to get this background is in childhood, when memory is freshest and keenest. Any educational system that belittles the importance of this background or spends too much effort in trying to find a painless way to impart it is cheating the children under its care.

As to the "integrated" social studies *versus* old-fashioned history and geography, a friend of mine recently related to me a story that has some relevance here. She had occasion to act as substitute teacher of an eighth grade in social studies, and on this particular day the class was reading together one of those miniature newspapers which are issued weekly for classroom use and are designed to keep children abreast of current affairs. The topic of discussion was the principles and

organizational structure of the United Nations, a fairly intricate subject even for adults. A comparison was made between the United Nations and the old League of Nations which contained a reference to the League's headquarters at Geneva. On asking the class to tell her where Geneva is, my friend discovered that no one knew or even had the foggiest idea of its approximate location, one pupil timidly suggesting that perhaps it was in Japan? On questioning them further she found that they generally had no mental image of the geographical world and the location of countries and cities. Their geography had been so "correlated" and "integrated" into the social studies that it had practically disappeared. But isn't it a little nonsensical to expect eighth-grade pupils to master the complex issues of world organization if they don't know anything about the physical facts of the world?

I have also heard sixth- and seventh-grade pupils, under the tutelage of Mr. Harold Rugg's famed social studies textbooks, sound off on the influence of Isadora Duncan on the modern dance and the virtues of modern architecture as exemplified in the personality of Frank Lloyd Wright, while they knew practically none of the simple facts of geography and history. They are far too immature to get any meaning from the former, which are matters for reflective adult consideration, and their minds are ripe to receive the latter. The result is necessarily a meaningless parroting of their elders, accompanied by a woeful ignorance of fundamental

factual knowledge that they will need as they grow older and have to make adult choices and express adult opinions.

Bronson Alcott was something of a pompous old windbag, and I can't discover that he ever said anything else of importance, but he did say this: "To be ignorant of one's ignorance is the malady of the ignorant." * The virus of this malady is inherent in modern educational philosophy. One can only feel a melancholy regret that our schools are sending young people into the world blithely unaware of the real treasures of an educated life.

4. Modern education says: *To external coercive discipline, both in conduct and choice of subject matter to be learned, must be opposed free expression of personality and free activity.*

The word "discipline" as generally understood has two meanings; it means control of conduct and it means the process of directed training. As a disciplinarian the teacher may be said to have two functions: the more or less negative one of maintaining formal classroom order (controlling conduct) and the other positive one of directing the pupil towards realization of selected goals (training). A natural corollary of discipline is coercion, the teacher necessarily imposing his will and his opinions on the pupil.

* Quoted by Albert Jay Nock in *Memoirs of a Superfluous Man* (New York, Harper & Bros., 1943), p. 1.

It might be said that the cornerstone of the edifice of the progressive education movement was the denial of this conception of discipline; the early leaders of the movement stressed consistently two ideas: that control of conduct, except in the most moderate form, is harmful to the development of self-realization, and that the "on-going process of experience" is more important than "special results" or, in other words, that means take precedence over ends.

It is my understanding that the movement has retreated somewhat from this position, even in those private progressive schools that try to maintain the original faith undefiled. Two factors seem involved in this retreat: as far as classroom control is concerned, many progressive teachers have reluctantly come to the conclusion that chaotic freedom of movement and speech is a serious bar to accomplishment; and as to "special results" or ends, an apostate group has arisen within the movement who insist that a new social order can be brought about only by deliberate indoctrination of pupils by teachers.

Public-school education, which has been influenced in so many directions by the progressive movement, does not, oddly enough, give wholehearted obeisance to the dictum that control of conduct in the classroom is harmful; I think it is correct to say that on the whole the public schools remain traditional enough on this score. But they have been strongly affected by the other half of the progressive view of discipline; public-school teach-

ers have become less and less guides along a well-marked path and more and more monitors who sit back and let the "on-going process of experience" flow over the pupils, content to do a little gentle refereeing here and there.

The idea seems to be that the child or adolescent or college youth is to be trusted to make his own wise decisions and that it is somehow damaging to his normal development to have the teacher set the goal and determine the means of reaching it. This idea has some curious and rather unfortunate repercussions, not the least of which is the inability of so many young people nowadays to make up their minds on any issue. This trend has even been noted by a professor of education who stated during the war: "Amongst the young people I teach I find an alarmingly high proportion, even today, saying such things as 'Who is to say that Hitler isn't right? He has his values and we have ours. They happen to be in conflict with ours, so we have to fight him. But that doesn't mean he is wrong.'"

This professor believes such an attitude is induced by an education that fails to develop moral understanding, but of course he hastens to add that it is traditional education that is at fault.* I am sure that in this regard traditional education is not blameless, but certainly its system of values was more nearly fixed than the relative system of the modernists; certainly it discriminated more

* John G. Pilley, in the symposium, *The Authoritarian Attempt to Capture Education* (New York, 1944), p. 92.

rigidly between "right" and "wrong" than does modern education.

This attitude of moral skepticism of which the professor complains is nowhere more in evidence than in dealing with controversial social questions, a field in which the modern educator thinks he operates much more realistically than did the old-fashioned schoolman. These questions are usually presented by the teacher with an elaborate effort towards objectivity and disinterestedness but with little attempt to trace their historical antecedents and with no attempt to resolve them; to attempt this is to commit the modern educational sin of assuming there are ultimate values in the light of which issues may sometimes be decided. The last thing the student will get from this kind of teaching is moral understanding: he will emerge from it inevitably a moral skeptic, certain only that all things are relative and that the terms *right* and *wrong* bear no relation to the realities of the social world.

Another result of the modern view of discipline is overvaluation of the pupil's judgment of what he should learn. On the college level this idea was introduced into American education by Charles W. Eliot with the elective system at Harvard and since then has seeped down into the secondary and even the elementary schools. The modern educator feels he can overcome any possible evils of this system by guidance programs that will gently steer all pupils into the right courses, but does not the assumption remain that education is like merchandise

for which you shop around until you find something to your taste?

What is perhaps the most regrettable result is impossible to describe in concrete terms; it is a sort of subtle atmosphere that seems to permeate schools where the "new" discipline is practiced. I think it is an atmosphere of plaintive bewilderment, for I believe that young people, no matter how irksome they may find it at the time, depend on direction and leadership and are at a loss when it is withheld from them. When you are a child or adolescent it is fun to be "treated like a grownup" on occasion; but as you are not a grownup, it is far more satisfying psychologically as a steady diet to have your real status acknowledged. In schools as in homes where the child is treated with unnatural equality, he will in the end compensate for the loss of his childhood status by becoming a minor tyrant making himself and those about him unhappy. In all too many cases the "child-centered school" has today become the child-dominated school.

Perhaps one who is not a psychologist of adolescence should avoid all *ex cathedra* utterances on the nature of youth, but certainly common sense would concur in the statement that the child is not, to use Jacques Maritain's expression, "a dwarf man" operating on the adult level, and that therefore he requires the active and purposeful guidance of a person of mature experience. This point of view is scoffed at by modern educators as "authoritarian" and "reactionary," which are unpleasant terms; but

until educators recognize its validity they may as well, as Robert M. Hutchins has written, "be prepared to confess that they are nothing but chaperons, supervising an aimless, trial-and-error process which is chiefly valuable because it keeps young people from doing something worse." *

Perhaps modern teachers are a little frightened by the word *discipline*. Certainly some of the practices committed in its name in the past had the grim stamp of Calvinistic theology on them; and even when grounded on more humane considerations, it was not always motivated by higher sentiments than those expressed by a Boston matron *circa* 1912 in the play version of Marquand's *The Late George Apley*, who said: "Children don't know what they want. It's really very simple: you just tell them."

The revolt against discipline among the progressive group was born largely in outrage at the harshnesses of the older education; it was a revolt based on a warm-hearted and humane feeling for children as individuals. Unfortunately this feeling became a hard-and-fast principle of pedagogy; some discipline is arbitrary and cruel, *ergo* all discipline is bad, so ran the refrain of these early revolutionaries. Exaggerated as is this view, it could result in a net gain if it would cause schoolmen to reconsider the whole matter of discipline and to arrive

* *The Higher Learning in America* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1936), p. 70.

at a moderate middle view: to think of discipline as something to be imposed with enlightened and patient common sense, with individual enrichment, not social solidarity, as its aim. Traditional education does not yet entirely take this view; Catholic education, for example, which is much to be admired for its sound classical background, its philosophical and schematic unity, and its devotion to human and spiritual ideals, seems to place too much value on *esprit de corps*, on a discipline that sometimes seems to aim at collective thinking and even collective piety.

Discipline is not an adult conspiracy against children; it is a responsibility adults owe to children. I cannot do better than to quote again Maritain, who sums up admirably what I have been trying to say on this subject:

The plastic and suggestible freedom of the child is harmed and led astray if it is not helped and guided. An education which consisted in making the child responsible for acquiring information about that of which he does not know he is ignorant, an education which only contemplated a blossoming forth of the child's instincts, and which rendered the teacher a tractable and useless attendant, is but a bankruptcy of education and of the responsibility of adults toward the youth. The right of the child to be educated requires that the educator shall have moral authority over him, and this authority is nothing else than the duty of the adult to the freedom of the youth.*

* Jacques Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1943), p. 33.

5. Modern education says: *It is the duty of the schools to train youth for vocations.*

Those who believe in vocational training in the schools divide themselves into two groups. Perhaps the larger group (including the various subsidiary associations of schoolmen affiliated with the National Education Association) believe that the schools can train for specific occupations; the other group places more emphasis on general work experience in the belief that every individual needs to learn manual dexterity. To the first group we can direct one question: What specific occupations will you train for? If I remember correctly, there are some twenty-five thousand different kinds of occupations in this country, and even if narrowed down to training in the kinds of occupations prevalent in a particular community, the number will be far too high for the school to include them all.

As for the argument of the second group, it seems to me that American youth for generations has been learning manual dexterity very effectively without the aid of the schools. Who taught Americans to drive automobiles; where did American youth get their genius for tinkering with machinery? These and a hundred other skills young people pick up naturally and easily without formal instruction by observing their elders or by learning from each other. A great many vocational skills, especially for specific occupations, can be far better and

more quickly learned on the job, and I believe most employers would prefer this procedure.

Not only does vocational training deprive the student of time that should be utilized for serious study, but it also deprives the school system of large sums of money which are needed for these genuine educational purposes. Boards of education, notoriously parsimonious when it comes to teachers' salaries, can be quite liberal in spending money for equipping elaborate home-economics and shop rooms. It is not uncommon to find schools where tens of thousands of dollars have been invested in equipment for woodworking and metal working, electrical apparatus, and equipment for automobile repairing, while the teaching staff is being paid below the prevailing rate. Equipment is showy and tangible evidence of an up-and-coming school, I suppose, but it is the first-rate teacher who has the greatest influence on human material. The results obtained from vocational training simply do not justify the expenditure. And speaking of costs in this connection, let me quote a minor example of current educational nonsense: the taxpayers of the state of Connecticut are permitted to read a pamphlet recently prepared at their expense by the Department of Education and devoted to an exposition of what is termed "the science of occupationology"; and the reader is assured that the possibilities of the application of this new science that lie ahead "stagger the imagination." One can well believe it.

Our modern educator may ask in a shocked tone:

"But isn't it the duty of the school to prepare the youth to earn his living?" To this I would answer that preparation for earning one's living is part of education; where I would differ with the educator is in defining preparation for livelihood. The individual who is best prepared for any kind of occupation is one whose intelligence has been so well trained that he is able to adapt himself to any situation, and whose point of view has been so humanized by his education that he will be a good person in any job or calling, and these qualities are the result only of a liberalizing education. This idea has been well expressed by Stringfellow Barr:

The man who has learned to practice these arts successfully [the arts of liberal education] can "concentrate" on anything, can "apply himself" to anything, can quickly learn any specialty, any profession, any business. That man can deliberate, can make practical decisions by other means than tossing a coin, can understand his failures, can recognize his obligations as well as his opportunities. He is, in short, what an earlier generation eloquently termed "an educated man." *

I think there is some evidence that employers who have been sold on vocational training are coming around to the point of view that the sort of person described by Mr. Barr makes the best employee. I think many of them realize that the great menace of specialization is competence without intelligence. I remember talking

* *Magazine Digest*, November 1943.

with an official of an airplane factory during the war who complained that many of his men were mechanically competent in dealing with a specific task laid out for them but seemed to lack the ability to deal independently with new problems; they were lost without recourse to a ready-made formula. They lacked adaptability, a primary requisite for which is a cultivated intelligence.

American educators talk eloquently about democracy and "the democratic right of all to education"; but it seems to me that what they are actually talking about is the democratic right of all to *some* kind of education. They betray as profound a distrust of the ability of all youth to "take" education as did the late Albert Jay Nock, who felt that most people were "sub-human" and that only an infinitesimal portion of the population is educable; an idea, incidentally, shared by the great democrat, Thomas Jefferson, who advocated a system of competitive schools which would weed out what he rather undemocratically called "rubbish." * I wonder if the insistence on including vocational training in the schools didn't arise in part from the conviction, fortified by the results obtained by "scientifically" determining intelli-

* I trust no one who is not acquainted with the writings of Mr. Nock will be discouraged from reading him by this harsh quotation. He was a charming if somewhat crotchety essayist, many of whose writings touch on educational matters. His book *The Theory of Education in the United States* (a new edition is being published by Henry Regnery Company) remains a little classic in its field, and his autobiography, *Memoirs of a Superfluous Man*, is well worth reading for his attitude on many subjects, including education.

gence, that education is beyond the ability of many to absorb, and that something must be found to occupy their time. If so, what could be more "undemocratic"?

This brings me back to the idea I have stated before, perhaps with wearying repetition. If we really believe in the values of education, we must believe they are good for everyone. This is not to say that everyone has the same abilities and capacities, but only that everyone has the same needs, needs that can never be met by vocational training but only by a humanizing and liberalizing education.

6. Modern education says: *Good teachers and administrators are produced only by courses in Scientific Method.*

If someone asked you, as a simple-minded and innocent layman, what qualifications a person should have for teaching school, you probably would reply that such a person ought to have native intelligence, personal qualities that would attract rather than repel young people, plus a well-rounded education that emphasized the speciality he was to teach. You would not be so foolhardy as to assert that anyone who has a wide knowledge of a particular subject is capable of teaching it, but you would probably insist on your point that anyone with native intelligence whose education (as true education should) has taught him to think logically and has equipped him with thorough knowledge of his subject,

can communicate that knowledge through teaching, unless he has some abnormal defect of personality which prevents him from dealing effectively with other persons.

Now if a modern educator were in your immediate vicinity when you gave your definition, he would smile indulgently at your ignorance and assure you that your answer was far too simple and indeed downright old fashioned and antiscientific. He would gently scoff at the idea that a liberal education equips one with the basic art of communication, or teaching, which needs only actual practice for its development. He would insist that the good teacher is only produced by rigorous exposure to courses in "method"; in other words, he has to be taught how to teach. He might make the analogy between the training of teachers and doctors (educators are fond of making it), suggesting that in both cases one must look for the best trained. Here you might counter that the best-trained doctor is one who has been given the best education in medicine, not in bedside manner; you might even make so bold as to suggest that the latter hardly comes within the realm of teachable things, but is something the well-trained and balanced mind develops on the job. But at this point I'm afraid your educator friend would shake his head sadly and leave you alone in your invincible ignorance.

You will be making a grave mistake if you dismiss the educator's theories as of no practical importance, for the fact is that they completely dominate the institutions from which our American public school teachers are

drawn. Our teacher-training colleges and the graduate schools of education in our universities are whole-heartedly devoted to methodology. Through these schools and their graduates this enthusiasm has been translated into practical legislative action: in most of the states in this country no new teacher can be certified who has not been exposed to "education," or method, in courses that consume about one year's time above his regular academic training; and most local boards of education usually base promotion in the system on further summer-school courses in method.

Don't think the educational hierarchy doesn't rigidly enforce this system. Socrates himself would find it extremely difficult to be certified. Let me quote a case that happened to come within my personal observation. A teacher-principal who had gone from college directly into public-school work twenty-five years ago, before his state had "educational" requirements, was invited by the school officials of a town in another state to apply for an important school position. He is a gentleman of considerable ability, something of a scholar in his own field, and moreover has been for some years principal of a school with an excellent reputation extending beyond his own state. The school officials who interviewed him were impressed with his talents, but upon inquiry of the state department of education, which controls certification of teachers and principals, it was learned that he could not qualify for the position unless he took the equivalent of a year's work in "education." His long record as teacher

and administrator, his actual experience in the field, counted for nothing unless he would submit to instruction in something he had been doing successfully for years. Thus does devotion to educational theory triumph over common sense!

I don't mean to imply that all educational methodology is useless. I would subscribe to the statement of the late Stephen Leacock, whose reputation as a humorist always served to obscure the fact that he was also an able teacher, that it is "10 per cent solid value and 90 per cent mixed humbug and wind." One of the troubles with modern teacher training is that it leaves almost nothing to the good common sense, intelligence, or imagination of the teacher. Methods are ready-made to cover every contingency; courses are devised for every subject, no matter how trivial, and every subdivision of a subject. If there isn't a course, at least there's a book that will give you the answers; one recent book on educational psychology advises teachers devoid of a sense of humor to develop one by reading Max Eastman's *Enjoyment of Laughter*!

If you want to get a clear picture of the hotchpotch of subjects offered in our teacher-training colleges, the bewildering range and staggering conglomerate mass of material, take a look at a catalogue of courses from one of these institutions. Perhaps a recent Bulletin of Teachers College, Columbia University, can be accepted as typical, for this school is one of the largest of its kind in the United States and is generally considered by educators

as a pioneer in the field. It would be impossible here to take more than a cursory glance at it, for it runs to over 200 pages with more than 140 of them containing listings of courses, but perhaps it will be rewarding to make a few samplings.

One can, of course, go to Teachers College for the purpose of advanced study in one's own field, but by far the major portion of the catalogue contains listings of courses in methods. There are all sorts of courses in the history and philosophy of education to which there can be no great objection except on the score of their probably repetitious nature. Regarding this field of study another remark of Leacock's is apt: "I should think that any trained student could get all that he needed of the history of education in a week of reading. I mean as far as its utility in actual teaching goes. Beyond that he could study it till he was grey with increasing interest to himself."

After historical and philosophical foundations come the courses in curriculum and administration, fifteen pages of them. There is a General Course in Curriculum Development, Problems of Curriculum and Teaching, Field Work in Curriculum and Teaching, Advanced Study and Research in Curriculum, Pre-seminar and Pre-project Conference in Curriculum, Procedures and Programs of Curriculum Improvement, and so on.

In Administration there is a Fundamental course and a course in Basic Concepts (one wonders what the difference is), all kinds of courses in Problems and Re-

search, separate courses in Administration of the Elementary School, Field Work in the Administration of the Elementary School, and Research in the Administration of the Elementary School; and several courses with vague titles such as Educating Teachers for Social Responsibility, Educational Administration as Social Policy, Group Activities in Colleges and Secondary Schools, Education Administration and Adaptability of School Systems, Student Personnel Administration, and Problems in Student Personnel Administration.

I must pass rapidly over the courses in sociology (the sociologists are busy as bees these days in education), the courses in tests, measurements, and evaluations thereof, the courses in statistics and parent education, and all the rest, and get on to psychology. As in any self-respecting teacher-training school, Teachers College offers courses in psychology in profusion: educational psychology, advanced psychology, psychology of adolescence, adult psychology, social psychology, clinical, abnormal, experimental, physiological, applied, and assorted other types of psychology. Also offered are three courses in the Rorschach "ink spot" method of diagnosing personality—introduction to, advanced practice in, research in. Closely allied with the courses in psychology are courses in Guidance and Counseling. (The uninitiated might suppose that a guide is also a counselor, but to so assume would be to underestimate the modern pedagogue's ability for making fine and subtle distinctions in subject matter.)

As guidance, supposedly based on psychological knowledge and understanding of youth, is a current rage among public schoolmen, with every up-and-coming school staffed with guidance men or counselors or school psychologists, it might be well for a moment to consider the question of psychology as part of teacher training. Here one needs to pick one's way carefully, for our modern rationalists are quick to scoff at the critic of psychology as an obscurantist, one who turns his back on present-day enlightenment and yearns for a return to the happy days of dark ignorance. Just as Margaret Fuller accepted the universe ("Gad, she'd better!" was supposed to have been Carlyle's retort), so must we accept modern psychology. It is not a myth but an overwhelming fact; no one denies its importance; no one can overestimate its great contribution to understanding of the human mind and the behavior of human beings. The trouble is not with psychology but the manner in which it is presented, the claims made for it, and the uses to which it is put by its practitioners.

Much of the course material is either trivial or presents the obvious in high-sounding terms and with a pseudoscientific jargon which must make the young student feel he is being made privy to something pretty profound and even revolutionary. This sort of thing is perhaps to be expected, for professors in all fields of knowledge are apt to worry all the light and joy out of knowledge. A very real complaint against the professors is the omniscient tone in which they present the subject.

Too much of the science of the mind has become bad science, as any science does when it claims to have eliminated all imponderables. It would be unfair to condemn modern psychology *in toto*, but certainly the *general tendency* of modern psychology is toward dogma; it is not that it is getting away from its prime function, which is study and investigation of the mind in order to discover general principles; but it is adding another function, namely, that of deducing pseudoscientific dicta from those principles which, if we will only follow them, will reward us with happiness, success, and satisfactory sex lives. For our modern cure of souls we turn to a practitioner of some branch of psychology rather than to priest or minister, but one may question whether this is entirely an improvement; the priest, at least, frankly acknowledged that his dogmas were an expression of faith, not "scientific truth."

Psychology needs a touch of imaginative humility. The psychologist needs to remember that in dealing with the human psyche there are imponderables, and when he approaches it with his tests and formulas and measuring rods, he should assume that his answers are tentative and do not necessarily amount to ultimate truth. I'm afraid that our cocky amateur psychologist-counselor-guide is a little too optimistic in thinking he can "get the number" of each individual in the student body; a little too complacent about the efficacy of his scientific paraphernalia for doing it. I wonder if the fears and aspirations, the desires and capabilities—in short, the picture of the

whole human being, can be adequately reflected in the neat pile of papers on the counselor's desk containing the student's tests—intelligence, aptitude, psychological, personality, and all the rest. It is significant that students have become "cases," a term borrowed from social workers, who are old hands at putting human problems into invariable categories and dealing with them by invariable formulas.

One thing that is very much in evidence in our schools of education is the influence of instrumentalism. If you talk much with recent graduates of these schools, I think you will find it very difficult to get them to take a definite stand on any abstract subject. They can talk glibly enough about educational techniques, but they are usually uncertain on any moral issue; they are sure anything old and traditional, anything with the aura of the past about it, is bad, but they seem not to be very certain of any good. Somehow they seem to have no central philosophy, no core of beliefs from which to judge issues, so that they can never be sure that one course of action is better than another. They have been taught to believe only in science, in the kind of truth which can be proven by tangible evidence.

"Knowledge of conditions as they are," says Professor Dewey, "is the only solid ground for communication and sharing; all other communication means the subjection of some persons to the personal opinion of other persons." As the child or youth is not usually equipped to

verify information given him, isn't it inevitable that the greater part of communication between parents and teachers and the child be based on "personal opinion" of adults? Isn't it also inevitable that the adult have certain ideal values which he tries to "impose" on the child, whether it be the ideal values of the religionist who tries to inculcate dogma and faith, or of Mr. Dewey who presumably would try to inculcate his own absolutism which is that there are no absolutes? In other words, communication (which is what teaching is) can never be wholly objective, an effort to teach only a knowledge of conditions as they are; indeed, teaching would be very dull if that is all it was.

Back at the turn of the century William Graham Sumner, perhaps Yale's most famous teacher (certainly her most vivid one), prided himself on his scientific attitude towards knowledge and truth; he had the habit of telling his students that they should approach every problem with three questions: "Is it true? How do you know? What of it?" But Sumner had some very decided and picturesque personal opinions regarding many economic, social, and political matters, opinions based largely on a moral absolutism strangely at variance with his lofty and austere scientific pretensions; and his utterances on these matters were apt to be of a rather oracular nature. Today it is principally these utterances that are quoted by the little band of devoted worshippers of Sumner to show what a great teacher he was. Sumner the scientific sociologist holds little of interest for us

today, but Sumner the moral polemicist and preacher is still a stirring and exciting figure.

By all means let teaching be based as much as possible on a "knowledge of conditions as they are," but let us not be afraid of personal opinion and personal conviction. The young person can slough off his teacher's opinions as he grows older, but the teacher's outlook is apt to remain with him. The man whose teaching influenced me more than any other is a man whose personal opinions I am today almost wholly unable to subscribe to; and I am sure the reader can point to parallel experiences where he was affected not so much by what the teacher said as by what he was.

Where Plato's Idea of the Good is present in a teacher, says Sir Richard Livingstone, "education will succeed; where it is absent, it can never have more than partial success. The mere existence in the teacher of such a view of education—and therefore of life—will communicate itself to the pupil, though the teacher may never mention it nor the child consciously realize it until long after; for a teacher's outlook educates more than anything that he says." * Teaching has something to do with moral outlook; the person who would communicate anything moving or inspiring—whether parent, teacher, or artist—must go beyond what is and venture into the realm of what ought to be. Instrumentalism tries to infect the teacher in training with an inhuman objectiv-

* *The Future in Education*, p. 119.

ity which cannot but reduce everything to a strangely lifeless and meaningless level.

All the abnormal emphasis on method at the expense of content, of which I have spoken, the glorification of "technique," cannot but have an adverse effect on the public school system. It means that new teachers are selected on the basis of efficiency in the mechanics of pedagogy (which are often mere fads, changing from year to year), and that teaching as a human relationship and the body of serious knowledge to be imparted are relegated to second place.

A few years ago in Grosse Pointe, Michigan (which I understand is supposed to have one of our better school systems), a list was drawn up stating the qualifications for teachers. With the typical educator's passion for precise categories, ten qualifications were named including interest in teaching, proficiency and skill in techniques, attractive personal qualities, willingness to experiment with new procedures, knowledge of modern trends in education and so on. Notably absent from the list was knowledge of the subject or subjects to be taught. I can myself recall an occasion when I engaged in fruitless argument with an educator about whether a "well-rounded personality" was more important in a history teacher than a knowledge of history!

Why should it surprise anyone that the public schools attract mediocre and superficial minds, the postulates of modern education being what they are? Second to the poor economic returns from teaching, the most impor-

tant factor that repels first-rate minds from entering public school teaching is the low intellectual state of the system. Those who have the knack for "getting on" will enter, but their interest lies elsewhere than in classroom teaching; they have their eyes cocked for the administrative jobs or for professorships of education where they will teach, not youth, but teachers how to teach youth. These two classes of persons are very important to the perpetuation of the system; the professors hand down the doctrine and the administrators see that it is applied. Let us now consider these brethren.

If you wanted to generalize about the kind of people who were in positions of supervisory responsibility for organized education one hundred, or even fifty, years ago, you might say they were chiefly distinguished by the possession of culture. (I mean culture in its original meaning: cultivation of the mind by mental and moral discipline. I don't mean culture in the women's-club sense which makes of it a sort of mixture of etiquette and the ability to gossip superficially about current novels and plays; or in the current conception of the sociologists which makes it the sum total of habits of thought and action acquired by man as a member of society.) The educator of the past was apt to be a scholar, usually in the field of the classics, who moved in an aura of intellectuality and moral precept.

Now if you would generalize about the modern educator, the first thing that would be forced on your attention is how completely the pendulum has swung in the

opposite direction. Your modern educator is anti-intellectual and anticultural, practical and narrowly scientific. Though he has been exposed to cursory training in the liberal arts, he is usually a specialist in some narrow field: ventilation, physical training, vocational agriculture, psychology, finance or home economics. And these specialists are expected to set the tone of the teaching of academic subjects.

Engage these people in conversation and the subject of education will rarely be mentioned unless you introduce it. They are interested in the mechanics of running a machine and can wax eloquent about bus transportation, schedules, janitorial equipment, lighting, inkspot removers, and paper towels. These interests are reflected in the professional journals for administrators, which almost never deal with the human equation in education or with philosophical or theoretical discussion. Out of a year's file I pick at random a copy of what is probably the leading journal of school administration and I find that these are the titles of the principal articles: "Can School Expenditures for Public Relations Be Justified?" "Physical Education—A Correlating Agent," "The District Clerk in the State of New Jersey," "Master Lists and Suggested Methods of Storage of Equipment for the Course in High School Physics," "Public Relations and Bond Issues," "Co-operative Occupational Training," "Indiana Schoolmen Study Postwar School Building," "Classroom Ventilation Requirements," "Sanitary Supplies for Schools," "Work Experience," "Preparing for

a Vocation," "The State's Part in Financing Education."

I don't mean to say that ventilation and sanitary supplies aren't important, for they obviously are, and somebody has to give them close attention, but these and kindred subjects are treated all too often as though they were the content of education. The same preoccupation with mechanics also seems to be the *leitmotif* of most of the meetings where administrators get together to talk shop.

I once had an enlightening experience that convinced me it is not an unfair generalization to say that public-school administrators are primarily business managers and only secondarily educators. I had the opportunity, over a period of time, of assisting in the interviewing of twenty-five superintendents of schools who were invited to express themselves freely on the subject of what constitutes an ideal high school. The majority of them, after preliminary formal genuflections in the direction of current educational dogma (to establish their orthodoxy immediately) proceeded then to show that the ideal high school is one with a good ventilating and lighting system, an up-to-date cafeteria, and an intercommunication system between the principal's office and classrooms. Three of the gentlemen of this group were what I suppose one might call educational "sports," who laid a disproportionate emphasis on education as training the minds of young people, to the consequent neglect of the new electric waxing machine and the noiseless plastic inkwells.

Because the modern administrator is so busy running his machine he has little time for reflective thought about the quality of the education handed out in his school system. He is usually content to accept uncritically the theories and methods that were hammered into him in his "education" courses and depend on his teachers (who have been subjected to the same hammering) to see that they are carried into practice. Because he is usually a person who does not enjoy teaching and got out of it and into administration at the first opportunity, he is temperamentally unsuited to supervise teachers in the old-fashioned sense of leading and inspiring them in the art of teaching; he simply has nothing within himself to offer in this direction. Consequently, aside from his role as business manager of the educational factories under his care, his principal function is the mechanistic one of facilitating the mass movement of students through the maze of subjects that constitute the curriculum.

Here I want to say a few words about the kind of people who make up the staffs of the state departments of education. Under our American system of public-school administration these departments have limited functions. Although in line with the modern tendency to centralize power there is agitation in some quarters to increase their authority, in most states their principal powers still relate to certification of teachers, seeing that the laws of compulsory school attendance and the state school-building code are enforced, and that any

subjects specified by state law are made part of the curriculum. Aside from these specific duties, their function is chiefly that of leadership and guidance in setting the tone and quality of school instruction in their particular state. That being their function you would suppose that men of the broadest education and culture would staff the state departments, for surely leadership cannot come from those trained only in a narrow specialism. But this, alas, is not usually the case.

Here I stand subject to correction, for my direct experience is meagre. Combining it, however, with what I have been told by those in a position to know, I would venture to assert that an educated person in any of our state departments would find himself very lonely indeed. He would find himself rubbing shoulders with public-relations experts, psychologists, business managers, statisticians. I don't mean to say that he wouldn't find such association instructive and interesting indeed, but he would be hard put to it to find a kindred soul with whom he could communicate on a common intellectual and spiritual level. Most of these state department people, incidentally, are ex-school superintendents who are happy to have removed themselves one step further from the human element in education.

As our conception of education moves nearer and nearer pure vocationalism, it is inevitable that men of the type I have mentioned should dominate the public schools. The old-fashioned schoolman thought of education as an end in itself; it was not a means of getting on

in the world; to paraphrase a comment of James Truslow Adams's, it was directed towards *being* and *becoming* rather than *doing* and *getting*. This conception of education as culture is what the modern educator turns his back on; that's all right, he intimates, for those who can take it, but we are concerned with the masses who need training for "successful living," which turns out to be success in the job.

The professors of education quoted earlier, Dr. Mort and Dr. Vincent, state:

Success with the scanty handful of subjects in a 1900-model school program does not measure success in life very well. But success in school can predict success in life when the school is more realistically aware of varieties of talent, when its program samples and develops these talents and in the widest possible way, providing experiences in music, painting, dramatics, sewing, constructing, public speaking, news gathering, library research, cooking, poetry writing, nature study, rug making, ceramics, printing, interviewing, metal work, aviation, cultivating plants, surveying, entertaining, home decorating, buying and selling, radio. . . .*

Having projected a couple of professors of education into the discussion, let me elaborate for a moment on the professor's role in public school education; for, as a body, the professors constitute the source of wisdom and understanding for the whole system. It is at their feet that the administrator learns the gospel, and only after the professorial laying on of hands can he go

* A Look at Our Schools, p. 45.

out and spread it in the world. But the professor's influence is not confined to the classroom; he is not content simply to indoctrinate his students with his utilitarian educational philosophy or to guide future administrators in preparation for their doctorates in writing theses on "Public School Plumbing Equipment," and "An Analysis of Janitor Service in Elementary Schools." He is no academic recluse, but operates also in the real world of men.

One way of making his influence felt is the school "survey." Here the educator acts in a capacity similar to that of the so-called efficiency expert who is called in to aid an ailing business concern. In almost every large city in America, sometimes in whole states, those responsible for running the schools have at some time or another found the overloaded, cumbersome machinery of the system threatened with collapse. Then an educator is called in to make a "survey" and to recommend where oil is to be dropped into the creaking machinery so that it may start grinding again.

The machine analogy is not inept, for it will be found invariably that the educator's recommendations amount to mechanical tinkering; bristling with graphs and statistics, his report will contain suggestions for financial panaceas, juggling of personnel and of courses and buildings, but of theoretical considerations it will be innocent. Because he and his like are the authors of the system, the educator can only see the mechanical defects; to question the theory behind the machine would

be to question the validity of his own occupational existence. (Just as a passing comment, I have always been impressed by the fact that most professors of education are also financial experts and often serve publicly in that capacity. Perhaps it is a tradition received from American college presidents, who are rarely scholars but always men of finance.)

If one took the trouble five years after the event to examine a school system that had followed carefully the professional's recommendations, one might perhaps find an increase in mechanical efficiency but I wonder if one would find any appreciable improvement in the type of human product turned out by the system. I venture to doubt it, and to suggest that the most impressive concrete result would be the memory of the not inconsiderable sum the taxpayers had to raise to pay for the educator's survey.

Another manner in which the professors keep their hold on public school education is by the writing of textbooks. Some statistically minded student ought to consider the problem (I'm sure it would do nicely for a Ph.D. dissertation) of the monopoly on the writing of textbooks enjoyed by educators. I have no idea of the figures, but most of the textbooks I have had occasion to examine are at least co-authored by the brethren: I believe a customary procedure is for a teacher or specialist in history or mathematics to write the book in collaboration with an educator.

Privately teachers will complain that they do all the

drudgery of compiling and writing, and the educator usually acts only as a "consultant." If you ask why in that case, they bother to seek such collaboration, they explain that administrators stand in such awe of the official point of view that it is much easier to get a textbook widely accepted if it carries an educator's name along with that of the real author. Like a bishop's *imprimatur* on a theological volume, it is a guarantee that the contents do not offend correct doctrine or true faith.

In a final chapter I shall touch on the problem of whether these men—the professors and their collaborators, the administrators—help to make the society in which we live or whether the society makes them (which discussion necessarily has in it the same element as is to be found in the chicken-or-the-egg conundrum), but for the moment it is necessary only to point to their ubiquitous presence and to the character of their influence. That influence is all on the side of the practical, on the side of that philosophy (if one may call it such) which considers education only in its vocational aspect. If history and Latin get in the way of courses in "buying and selling," and "entertaining," shorten and emasculate them or drop them altogether. As one progressive educator has recently said, "The abnormal amount of time devoted to Latin often interferes with instruction in Music, Science, Social Studies, Art and Carpentry." * The same writer says the study of Latin in our schools should be continued only if we can find "a substantial

* Francis Behn Riggs in *Progressive Education*, October 1946.

scientific argument for its continuance." His "scientific argument" turns out to be merely a pragmatic test: if students need Latin because they expect to gain their livelihood by teaching Latin or by becoming lawyers or doctors, then there is justification for retaining it as a school subject. But as he is inclined to think that the law or medical student could get by with a few weeks' course in the structure and logic of legal or medical language, this seems to imply that we are justified in teaching Latin only to prospective teachers of the subject. Obviously we run into an absurdity here, for if nobody is to take Latin, to whom are the teachers to teach it? What the argument amounts to is that we should drop Latin from the secondary school entirely, and this is an aim to which most educators are wholeheartedly devoted.

Before the war a very distinguished group of educators conducted one of their eternal "revaluations" of the public schools, this particular one being in New York. The point of view of those in charge of American schools generally can perhaps be summed up fairly in a sentence from their report: "The State of New York wants the education given its children to be useful and up to date." Of course; no right-thinking American could object to that as a slogan; it could be emblazoned on the banner of any Rotarian or Kiwanis luncheon group; it fits in admirably with the ideal of material success, of getting on in the world. If this is to be our ideal of education, if education is to be measured in terms of its utilitarian value and its devotion to up-to-the-minute de-

vices, then surely we have no cause for complaint in the type of persons who dominate the public schools. Indeed, it would be foolhardy to employ any other type. The condition would be similar to that resulting if you hired a symphony orchestra conductor to lead a jazz band: he would feel uneasy and uncomfortable, and the members of the band would be bewildered by an alien influence imposed on their conception of music.

In the contemporary spiritual atmosphere of American society, and of the schools as part of that society, the public schoolman is admirably fitted to the job. He is giving the customers what they want: did not a recent nation-wide survey reveal that 71,000 high school students think the first aim of education is *How to Earn a Living*? Why should he risk his job and his reputation by going against the trend? His own schooling emphasized social, not individual, considerations and inculcated in him a respect for majority opinion and the ideas and ideals of the collective. He can only be suspicious of true education, intellectualism, culture, and individualism. These call for qualities that are inimical to herd ideals: such qualities as independence, personal responsibility, personal conviction, and moral judgment. He is enslaved by a philosophy that produces moral myopia and prevents him from seeing that education might be a means of achieving freedom.

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CHAPTER IV

The Schools as a Reflection of the Spirit of the Times

THE SPIRIT OF THE TIMES is one of those large and somewhat oratorical phrases that should be used guardedly. There have been periods in history, I suppose, when there has been no unifying principle at work in society which could be called the spirit of the times, especially in those twilight periods when a dominant philosophy was on the wane and a rival philosophy in the ascendancy. There have been, on the other hand, historical epochs that we recognize as having been marked by a definite spirit and a unique outlook; one of the most famous, of course, was the thirteenth century in Europe, the great flowering time of the religious spirit, and another was what we call roughly the Age of Elizabeth in England, dominated by a universal spirit of discovery and commercial adventure.

Can our own age be said to exhibit distinctive points of view, habits of thought, or philosophical attitudes to a degree great enough to constitute a "spirit of the times"? I am not prepared to make any sweeping gen-

eralizations about the matter, but it does seem to me that there are two rather obvious tendencies present in our contemporary world which make our own times somewhat unique. *We live in a period when the concept of the importance of the individual has been largely replaced by the concept of the social, and when it is widely believed that all personal and social problems can be resolved by use of the scientific method.* These two tendencies are in evidence in much current thinking and especially in our thinking about educational matters.

The importance and the unique value of the individual, which is an idea inherited from the teachings of Christ and Christian theology, has always been a cornerstone of modern western thought. Most of the great nineteenth-century social philosophers conceived of society not as an entity or organism in itself but as the aggregate sum of all individual action and inter-action. They would agree with Toynbee, who says:

A society . . . is a product of the relations between individuals, and these relations of theirs arise from the coincidence of their individual fields of action. This coincidence combines the individual fields into a common ground, and this common ground is what we call a society. . . . If this definition is accepted, an important though obvious corollary emerges from it. Society is a "field of action" but the source of all action is the individuals composing it.

In developing this definition Toynbee also quotes Bergson to show that social progress is not something that takes place of itself; society leaps forward when it

has "allowed itself to be convinced, or at any rate allowed itself to be shaken; and the shake is always given by *somebody*." Human society in this respect, as Toynbee suggests, is unlike "the static social life of gregarious animals or insects [where] abnormal members of the swarm or hive or pack are harried to death by the rank and file." * This happens also in human society (witness the long roll of martyrs) but not invariably; in this exception lies the difference between men and animals and also whatever hope there be for mankind. Sometimes the herd allows itself to be convinced, sometimes the abnormal member shakes and gets away with his shaking.

Bergson was thinking of the mystic and the seer when he spoke of society's being convinced or shaken into progress by individuals, but his idea is equally true on a more mundane level. Advances in scientific and industrial research and discovery, exploration and development of new lands—all new and experimental procedures—necessarily take place within a social milieu; but they are brought about only by individual action and initiative.

Since the beginnings of civilization man has accomplished much in spite of the static society around him, but the greatest periods of creative accomplishment occur when society is in a dynamic, not a static, state. Society is in a dynamic state when there is present an

* Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Abridgement of Vols. I-VI (New York, Oxford University Press, 1947), pp. 211-13.

atmosphere of freedom—that is, when individuals feel they can think, investigate, and act, free of all arbitrary pressures. The healthiest society is but a step removed from anarchy, a society bound together by the minimum of rules necessary to preserve order and maintain justice. This atmosphere of freedom seems especially to foster and encourage scientific and technological advance. It was no accident that the great spurt of activity in these directions during the past one hundred and fifty years came after political and social freedom moved out of the abstract and into the positive stage of its development during the nineteenth century. Perhaps it was inevitable that much of that advance should take place in America, where there were fewer vestiges of feudal and aristocratic habits of thought to be eradicated.

This conception of the individual's being the basis of society was, as I have said, the point of view from which most (at least among the Anglo-Saxons) of the social philosophers of the nineteenth century wrote. But another school of thought arose during this period with a different view of the nature of society. Some members of this school, ignoring the separate parts which alone comprise the whole, conceived of society as an organism in itself, or in some other fashion as having a mystic independent existence; and while other members held less extreme views, the whole school was united in magnifying the value of social solidarity and belittling individual autonomy.

If there is any unity in our discordant world of today it consists in a devotion to this socialistic principle; there may be violent disagreements over details of the blueprint for the new world, but there is a general and widespread feeling that such a world can only be realized by *narrowing the areas of individual freedom and enlarging the areas over which the authority of the social whole is supreme.*

As society became more and more infected with this belief in social solidarity, it was natural that the power-mechanism for making it an actuality should be sought. This mechanism was found in the erection of all-powerful states starting with Bismarckian Germany and culminating in the superstates of today. Power is something that all believers in freedom have rightfully feared. The wisest element among those who founded our American system of government believed that the healthiest society was one where power was as widely diffused as possible. Individual power can easily degenerate into evil; collective power does so almost inevitably, whether it be the power of governments, big business, or labor unions. Niebuhr's phrase "moral man and immoral society" describes the eternal truth about power: that men alone can often be good but men together are usually evil.

Today nothing is more obvious than the enormous consolidation of power which has taken place during the course of the last seventy-five years, and nothing seems more inevitable than its further headlong progress.

Though we have just fought a bloody war to eliminate power in Germany, Italy, and Japan, and seem disposed to fight another one to eliminate it in Russia, no one is naive enough to think it is power *per se* we want to be rid of, but only rival power. If this seems a harsh dictum one has only to look about him and observe the actions of the so-called democracies.

Although Great Britain's power in the empire sense seems definitely on the wane, she is committed at home to a policy of state control over her citizens which would cause her great defenders of constitutional liberty to shudder were they alive today. Mr. Harold Laski, who is widely accepted in Britain as a wise social philosopher, openly suggests that the power of Parliament must be curtailed if those responsible for social and economic reforms are to have their way. The arch-planner, Sir William Beveridge, speaks of essential and nonessential freedoms, the latter being those freedoms the state does not choose to recognize. And a member of the present government, the Minister of Town and Country Planning, is quoted in the press as declaring that the famed idea that "an Englishman's home is his castle" is a selfish sentiment that stands in the way of people's giving of "their best to the service of the community."

This same spirit is in evidence in the other democracies. General DeGaulle, who is looked upon in many quarters as the possible saviour of French republicanism, demonstrated that you may shatter the vase but the odor of the *Führerprinzip* lingers on, when he intimated in a

public speech at Lille that in the future French citizens must learn to curb the desire for independent action and subordinate themselves to "those responsible for management."

In America this power philosophy has made slower progress, for our whole history from the beginning has been a protest against its implications, but the infection is gradually spreading from the old world. One evidence of impatience with traditional processes is the rise here during the last fifteen years of a new political phenomenon, the government bureau, which operates largely outside the law, aggregating to itself judicial as well as executive powers. These bureaus are usually manned by a new type of civil servant, the "expert" planner, often an "economist" or a graduate of some branch of social service, who believes quite sincerely that government power must be vastly enlarged if his fine schemes for doing good to people are to succeed. Such is the corrupting influence of power that these good men often become twice as ambitious and ten times as ruthless as an old-fashioned Tammany chieftain.

One of the curious and discouraging things about the times in which we live is that the real nature of power is not recognized even by some of the best writers (Arthur Koestler, as an outstanding example) who have discussed the question. While recognizing its evil effects in Fascism and Communism they seem to retain a naive faith that it can be used beneficently in the democratic state. Many years ago the great libertarian, William

Graham Sumner, uttered a truth that our day is ignoring to its peril, when he said that if the state "enters as an agent into the industrial or social relations of its own subjects, it becomes the greatest and worst of all monopolies, the one best worth having under one's control, the best prize of base struggles, and the most powerful engine by which some men may exploit others." *

< Now the American public school system has not yet become a powerful arm of the state, despite much agitation to make it such. Control still rests with the individual states and towns, with the national Office of Education in Washington acting largely in an advisory and research capacity. With such a system of loosely organized free education, with control in local hands and with only cursory outside supervision, it is more difficult to indoctrinate all youth with uniform opinions. In the past our schools buttressed official prejudices and currently acceptable habits of social thought; but such was the diversity in our union that these prejudices were apt to be local in nature. >

Although we have so far escaped any system of rigid national control such as prevails in most European countries, our schools have not been able to escape the intellectual climate of our times. The educational reformers of the 1840's and '50's, in agitating for free

* "Separation of State and Market," *The Independent*, February 14, 1889. Reprinted in *Essays of William Graham Sumner* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1934), p. 240.

schools, did so not in the cause of social solidarity but of individual betterment: they believed that the aim of education was to produce the good individual, and that in the aggregate these good individuals would make the good society.

That is not the atmosphere in which our educational leaders operate today; there are many evidences that what they are interested in putting across in the schools is collective virtues and collective ideals. Let me refer you, for an example, to *Schools for a New World*, the 1947 Yearbook of the American Association of School Administrators, a powerful and influential body that does much to set the tone of our school system. If you have supposed that education is concerned with developing the highest capabilities of the individual as an individual, that it is concerned with self-realization, these educators will set you aright.

The unavoidable choice in education, we learn, "is between the primacy of the individual and the society of which he is a part." These gentlemen leave no doubt as to which side they are on: "unreserved priority" must be given to "the unity and well-being of our society as a whole." This means "a fundamental shift in emphasis throughout our whole educational program, from helping to educate the individual in his own right to become a valuable member of society, to the preparation of the individual for the realization of his best self in the higher loyalty of serving the basic ideals and aims of our society." It seems also that the "dynamic" conception

of the individual's worth "places the emphasis on his functional significance in our society." And then the authors show they understand that only consolidation of power can overthrow individualistic education by insisting that in the future there must be "a vast stepping up of the functions of government on all levels." *

I hesitate to use the term because of its jingoistic associations, but using it in its best sense these statements may be justly called un-American. If there is such a thing as the "American idea," doesn't it consist in the thought that individuals do have primacy and that social groupings and the state exist only for the purpose of serving individuals? And hasn't our whole history, from the founding of the country until recent times, been a living protest against "the higher loyalty" and the "stepping up of government functions"? That these statements can be made by a group of educators responsible for the administration of our public schools and apparently occasion no shock or surprise, is one more evidence of how far we have traveled along the road to totalitarianism.

It has always seemed to me somewhat ironical that educators of the type mentioned above should taunt advocates of individualistic education with the cry of "authoritarianism." Which is more nearly an education of authority—one that maintains that man should de-

* *Schools for a New World* (Washington, D. C., American Association of School Administrators, 1947), p. 43 f. Cf. Chap. IV, "The Purpose and Function of Education."

liberately and freely adopt his own individual values or one that says he must adjust his individual preferences to the values of the social group? Education of the latter type weakens the initiative and independence of the individual, subjects him to the irrational prejudices of current social tendencies, and renders him ripe for control and manipulation by the state. Emerson's dictum that nothing in the end matters save the integrity of one's own soul is replaced by "the higher loyalty" to group or state; man is reduced from a free agent to a robot.

There is a peculiar confusion in public school education today which arises from the fact that educators have permitted themselves to be buffeted about by winds of doctrine which do not blow in the same direction. While they have been insisting on "freeing the child's personality" by lessening the pressure of the individual authority of the teacher, they have been exalting the authority of the social mass. By so doing, our schools are helping as much as any institution among us to produce automatons ripe for exploitation by clever and unscrupulous men—politicians, movie magnates, labor leaders, newspaper publishers—who recognize and take advantage of the new herd instinct for uniformity.

I have stressed individualism so constantly throughout this book that I trust no careless reader will misinterpret my meaning and conclude that I hold to some archaic and unreal conception of the individual as a completely free agent existing in a vacuum. Man is a social creature

and his life assumes meaning only in the flux of social relationships; one of the aims of education, therefore, is to teach man how to adjust himself to community living. But modern education tends to make this one aspect of education the most important one—and it is not. The most important aspect is just that intellectual and moral development of the person as a person which these educators believe is now outmoded. If one is looking for a prescription for the spiritual illness of our time, I think it can be found in a reaffirmation of the idea so finely worded by Maritain, that “the group attains its goal only by serving man and by realizing that man has secrets which escape the group and a vocation which is not included in the group.” *

I come now to the second thing which I have said is characteristic of contemporary life: the widespread belief that all our problems, personal and social, can be solved or at least ameliorated by recourse to the scientific method. The argument here is that if we would study human and social relationships without prejudice and without preconceived philosophical-religious notions about the nature of man; if we would ask questions fearlessly and seek the answers and then revise all previous assumptions in the light of our new findings; in other words, if we would employ the same methods of experimentation and research as does the worker in the physical sciences, then we could make the same marvel-

* *Education at the Crossroads*, p. 15.

ous advances in social relationships which have resulted from the employment of this method in technology and natural science.

A prime requisite for the adoption of a genuine social science, we are told, is the abandonment of those moral absolutes and metaphysical notions of truth, which, we are led to believe, are burdens that have weighed down the backs of men and prevented them from standing erect as free and emancipated beings. Not until we get rid of the idea of truth as being ultimate and absolute, we are further told, and learn to regard it as a term to be applied to what is currently workable; not until we acknowledge that morality, in the words of Sidney Hook, "depends for its sanctions upon its beneficent fruits in social and personal life"; not, in other words, until we adopt a thoroughgoing pragmatic attitude shall we begin to face the problems of social living realistically and with some hope of resolving them.

The point of view of the typical social scientist is cogently stated in a recent essay by the sociologist, George A. Lundberg, titled *Can Science Save Us?* * Mr. Lundberg magnanimously tells us that it is all right for us to escape "the cares of the day" by indulging ourselves with philosophy, religion, music, and poetry, as long as we distinguish between fact and fable, the practical and the fantastic. But truth is to be found elsewhere—in the physical and social sciences, which will be "to an increasing degree the accepted point of refer-

* New York, Longmans, Green & Co., 1947, *passim*.

ence with respect to which the validity [truth] of all knowledge is gauged."

The social scientist is compared to the honest physician working out a painstaking diagnosis while the social idealist is declared to be blood-brother to the snake-oil practitioner promising a quick and painless cure. And there seems to be no limit to the social good that will ensue if only we let the painstaking scientist have his way. According to Mr. Lundberg, he can show us how to turn our children into socially approved citizens, how to predict the probable relative degrees of happiness in marriage, how to devise tax programs which will yield with a high degree of mathematical certainty whatever revenue is desired, how to determine what the masses want and develop the techniques for satisfying those wants, and how to determine the outcome of the next election.

How is this sleight-of-hand to be performed? It seems that the social scientist has invented for the purpose some "instruments" (called standardized tests, schedules, statistical devices, etc.) which are still fairly crude because this is a new science, but Mr. Lundberg suggests that when the boys really get going they will invent some humdingers. The major social problems of the day are going to be solved by the use of these "instruments of precision" in hands "that do not shake with fear, with anger, or even with love."

In the light of man's notorious shortsightedness in accepting what is good for him, we may well ask how the

beneficial results of social science are to be realized in the face of human contrariness. Mr. Lundberg steps up bravely to this obstacle and says the social scientist is going to need authority. A lot of nonsense has been written about authority in the past, he assures us; we need not fear authority as such but only incompetent and unwisely constituted authority; and of course we have nothing to fear from the godlike scientist whose hand does not tremble with human weaknesses. When we realize how wise he is we will not hesitate to delegate authority to him, any more than we now hesitate to delegate authority to the physician. In the future all persons who presume to speak with authority will be expected to submit credentials of training and character to the state, whether they "purport to speak for God or for nature." (Mr. Lundberg here ignores one aspect of the problem. He neglects to state that the authority of the physician is something to which we submit voluntarily; we ignore his advice to our possible peril, but ignore we can if we so choose. But in England and America today the civil service is overloaded with social scientists whose theories we cannot ignore because they are backed up by the weight of law and governmental compulsion.)

In this scheme of things, what is the role of education? Mr. Lundberg says we must, as soon as possible, inculcate into our population a rudimentary understanding of the nature of scientific method as applied to human affairs, and a conviction that this is the only

effective approach. As far as the curriculum is concerned, he feels that it should be divided into two compartments, science and the arts; science, of course, being "the accredited arbiter of physical and social fact," with the arts, including literature and a good deal of history, recognized as pleasant stimulants of the imagination and the emotions but never to be accepted as "truth" until tested by the methods of science.

As for the effects of social science on religion, Mr. Lundberg is quite cheerful. As ethical norms change and affect human institutions, including the church, social science "will greatly facilitate this adjustment, because through science man can secure a very much more adequate knowledge of the consequences of different types of conduct, instead of relying upon ancient and arbitrary authority for this counsel." Having thus chipped away at the foundation and basis of religion, one might suppose it was left in rather a shattered state. Such is not the case: religion, like the arts, is to continue as a recreational and esthetic stimulant. Mr. Lundberg has always suspected that this side of religion has a deeper appeal, anyway, than its ethical and moral content.

I have quoted from this book at such length because it seems to me to be an accurate and representative statement of the spirit and intellectual temper of a large part of American life, and especially of those who dominate the life of our public schools. This spirit seems to me, to put it mildly, a little on the pretentious side. Taking

the term "science" in one of its meanings, there is no reason why social scientists and sociologists shouldn't term the body of information they collect about social behavior "science" if they want to: I suppose any body of systematized information about anything can be called science. But as traditionally understood, science means a good deal more than this. It means mathematically exact knowledge discovered through induction and experimentation; it is what we acknowledge as truth in the sense of proven facts.

Considered in the light of this definition a great deal of what passes for social science can hardly be termed science at all; a body of interesting and enlightening information, perhaps, but hardly exact and eternal truth. Much of it is not even enlightening; it is pointless. For example, a recent questionnaire sent out by a "research" organization asked four thousand teachers if they enjoyed teaching. Not content with this simple and direct question, the researchers divided it into categories, asking the teachers if they seldom enjoy teaching, usually enjoy teaching, enjoy it but could have learned to like something else equally as well, enjoy it enough to be sure they prefer it to other work, enjoy it so much it is to them the most adventurous, exciting, and thrilling of all professions.

The resulting percentages are said to provide "valuable comparisons," and we are left to presume that the circumstance that 39 per cent of 1,700 rural women teachers *prefer* teaching and 11 per cent are in the more

precise category of thinking of it as *exciting*—that this isolated bit of information constitutes valuable scientific data. If space permitted, one could multiply a hundred-fold examples of this kind of “social research,” particularly in the field of education. The results of many of these projects are now masses of yellowing paper in the storage files of foundations and other organizations devoted to research, but unfortunately they all too often are used as the basis of policy.

The chief reason social science cannot be a real science is because of the subject matter with which it largely deals: man as a human and social being. The scientists can tell us some pretty exact truths about man as a physical animal, for in the animal realm human beings share uniform characteristics and react to the stimulus of the environment in uniform ways. In the realm of behavior, however, man is less predictable, and the moment you have established some seemingly invariable laws governing his conduct he will, in the most ornery fashion, fly off in another direction.

This is a distressing fact to the social scientist because it upsets the nice balance of his formulas and predictions; very often he will peevishly deny that it is true. He will tell us that we *are* predictable because what we do is not a matter of free choice: we do it because we can't help ourselves; our actions are determined by forces outside conscious choice, the state of our glands, or the dictates of our subconscious. The same determinism, he will tell us, also dooms social groups. This is the point

where he rushes in as knightly savior; he will make a "scientific" study of social behavior, give us a true picture of the "facts," and by intelligent planning ameliorate social conflicts and bring about social peace and well-being.

He recognizes only one truth, and science is its name. But what he calls "prejudices"—man's ingrained habit of setting up ethical and moral ideals, his belief that his own life must mean something and that the universe should "make sense"—are certainly "facts" about the nature of man, for demonstrably they exist and always have existed. No matter how irritating it may be to sociologists, man is a metaphysical as well as a physical and political animal.

Man is also a creative artist who cannot resist recording his visions and imaginings. Is it not barely possible that this passion for religion and art, based on the desire for order, meaning, and expression, can be refined to the point where it also is a means for discovering truth? And is it not probable that the good society is a hopeless aspiration until individual men are bound together by common truths and common values by which to judge all action? Is not this what Plato, as quoted by Sir Richard Livingstone, meant when he said that the use and excellence of all sciences and all knowledge will fail us "without the knowledge of good and evil"? *

Under the guidance of "the scientific spirit" modern

* "Education for a World Adrift," reprinted in *On Education*, op. cit., p. 25.

education cannot but fail to give young people a knowledge of good and evil, for to the social scientist these are relative terms. The student is taught to believe that goodness is what "works out," something that brings "beneficent fruits in social and personal life," without defining any standard of beneficence; "standards" and "values" are to the modern educator prescientific, theological terms. It is precisely this attitude that produces in the student that sinister lack of individual moral freedom which Lafcadio Hearn declared was the result of Japanese education, which, as he pointed out, has always been an education based on social cohesion.* By fostering this attitude in the student he will never know whether we're right and Hitler wrong; he will never develop any value-system by which to judge the intrinsic worth of anything. At best this kind of education will produce only clever, wary animals who have learned how to keep out of trouble.

Assuming that collectivism, pragmatism, and scientism are to become ever broadening influences in the future, and that education will be their handmaiden, let us imagine the life of an average American citizen in the year 2000. Aside from producing him, his parents will be a negligible factor in his life, for the upbringing of citizen-robots can hardly be left to the whims of individuals. Private schools by then will have been abolished as antisocial, and the child will perforce go to a public

* *Japan: An Interpretation*. Quoted by Isabel Paterson in *The God of the Machine* (New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1943).

school, where science will be the dominant part of a curriculum aimed at preparing him "for the realization of his best self in the higher loyalty" of serving the state. His high school and college training will be strictly utilitarian, devoted to learning a specialty assigned to him by the state; for as production and all industrial activity and the professions will be controlled, the state will decide who and how many are to enter each activity. If he shows unusual talent for "leadership," he will be trained in a special school for public officials. This will be an honor for which the competition will be keen, for in a society where the state is supreme (as in Russia today) the bureaucrats will be the favored class.

If by chance the scientific attitude has not entirely succeeded in wiping out an atavistic leaning toward the problems of philosophy and art on the part of some persons, they will be permitted to express themselves in either of two ways: either by purveying official philosophy and official art, or by providing innocuous and trivial entertainment for the relaxation of those who are carrying on the serious business of the state.

If by some miracle our future citizen has a yearning for the delights of religion there will be churches for him to attend—strictly for esthetic stimulation, of course, for, since the clergy will be licensed by the state, they won't be caught setting up any rival moralities or acknowledging any higher authority.

Love will be put on a scientific basis. No longer will marriage be an act of faith, but when our imaginary

citizen decides to marry he will go to a state-operated marriage clinic, where his prospective partners will be tested to predict "the probable relative degrees of happiness" he might have with each. An official guide book to "sane and scientific sex living," revised annually, will be by his bedside ready to give him the latest "low-down" on when and how.

Indeed, everything he does and thinks will be shaped and colored by the revealed truths of social science and will be done and thought in mass unison. All spontaneous individual and social action will wither away; the group and the state will reign supreme.

But possibly this is too dark and hopeless a picture. Perhaps the small, fierce spark of man's spirit, the spark of his passion for freedom and personal dignity and for his own personal secrecies, may prove to be not entirely extinguishable. Perhaps this spark, nurtured and guarded by scattered eccentrics, will be fanned into flames of sedition great enough to undermine and destroy the new order. It has happened before in the long course of man's history on this earth and it could happen again.

This book has been devoted to what I suppose might be called "destructive" criticism; I have been content to point out what I think is wrong with modern education and only by implication have suggested remedies. It would be nice to be able to offer a detailed program of action; to suggest, perhaps, the blueprint of an organiza-

tion designed to cure the evils I have described. But the solution, I'm afraid, is not to be found as easily as that.

We will not resolve our school problems until individual parents indulge in some extensive critical examination, not only of the schools but of themselves; until they come to a realization of what true education is and how absolutely vital is the need of their children for this education in a world that seems devoid of values and direction. I am willing to throw out one general suggestion for improving education: Let's restore its moral content. Let us fly in the face of scientific prejudices and insist on education's historic role as moral and intellectual teacher.

The world in which we live is revolutionary if science has taught us not to believe in unifying principles and ideals; and unless this revolution is to triumph completely and destroy our civilization, an effort has to be made somewhere to restore some aims and standards—yes, even some absolute values. We have been going along now for some time on the theory that education consists simply of experience and change and “growth,” and this theory has not, as far as I can see, furthered the millennium to any startling degree. Perhaps we need to set up some ends for education; perhaps we need to ask, “Growth towards what?”

Bibliographical Note

It occurs to me that other laymen and parents not acquainted with educational literature may find pleasure equal to mine in some of the books I have enjoyed (and sometimes leaned upon heavily) in the writing of this essay. Some of them are mentioned in the text. Two in particular I would recommend without reservations: Jacques Maritain's brilliant Terry Lectures at Yale published under the title, *Education at the Crossroads* (Yale University Press, 1943); and two little books by Sir Richard Livingstone, President of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, combined in one volume under the title *On Education* (originally issued in the United States by The Macmillan Company and now by Cambridge University Press).

As stated in my text, many of the books by the late Albert Jay Nock deal entertainingly and sometimes trenchantly with educational subjects. *Teacher in America* by Jacques Barzun (Atlantic—Little, Brown, 1945) considers ponderous matters amusingly and with a nice combination of charm and common sense. Nor should the reader overlook the various writings of Robert M. Hutchins and Mark Van Doren who have worked val-

iantly to preserve genuine educational values in the face of the modern onslaught.

The literature of the modern-progressive school is vast and is still best represented by the writings of John Dewey. Perhaps his *Democracy and Education* (The Macmillan Company, 1921) is the most complete one-volume statement of the modern viewpoint.

Any reader who wants further documentation of how public school men regard education, I would refer to the flood of reports and research projects turned out by the National Education Association and its subsidiary organizations, and to similar reports from the United States Office of Education; to the numerous published surveys of school systems; to the propaganda of state departments of education; and to almost any book, article, or utterance by any professor of education. I think the reader dogged enough to survive the prose style of these outpourings will agree that I do not exaggerate in insisting that there is an extraordinary uniformity of opinion among public school men regarding the aims and content of education.

